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# The Relationship of Fashion in Women's Dress to Selected Aspects of Social Change From 1850 to 1950.

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF FASHION IN WOMEN'S  
DRESS TO SELECTED ASPECTS OF SOCIAL  
CHANGE FROM 1850 TO 1950.

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF FASHION IN WOMEN'S DRESS  
TO SELECTED ASPECTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE  
FROM 1850 TO 1950

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Sociology

by  
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January, 1962

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENT. . . . .	ii
LIST OF FIGURES . . . . .	viii
ABSTRACT. . . . .	ix
 CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
Need for Study . . . . .	5
Objectives . . . . .	8
Scope of the Study . . . . .	10
Definition of Terms. . . . .	14
Fashion . . . . .	15
Style. . . . .	17
Social change. . . . .	18
The structural areas of dress design . . . . .	20
The structural lines of dress design . . . . .	20
Silhouette . . . . .	21
The bell silhouette. . . . .	21
The bustle silhouette. . . . .	21
The tubular silhouette . . . . .	22
Details of dress . . . . .	22
Method of Study. . . . .	22
Frame of reference and approach. . . . .	22
Design of study and study procedure. . . . .	27
II. REVIEW OF AVAILABLE LITERATURE . . . . .	33
III. THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE BELL SILHOUETTE IN DRESS TO THE SOCIAL SITUATION FROM 1850 TO 1869 . . . . .	48
Fashionable Dress from 1850 to 1869 . . . . .	49
Typical dress of the period. . . . .	49
Change in dress. . . . .	51
The source of fashionable dress. . . . .	52
Fashion leadership . . . . .	54

The Relationship of Change in Selected Objective Aspects of the Social Situation to Fashionable Dress. . . . .	56
Technological developments . . . . .	56
Economic developments. . . . .	60
Social stratification. . . . .	62
The family and status of women . . . . .	67
The Relationship of Change in Selected Subjective Aspects of the Social Situation to Fashionable Dress. . . . .	71
Romanticism and sentimentality . . . . .	72
Prudery. . . . .	74
Femininity and dependence. . . . .	75
Materialism. . . . .	78
Consciousness of social class. . . . .	80
The Relationship of Crises in the Social Situation to Fashionable Dress . . . . .	82
Crises in France . . . . .	82
Crises in the United States. . . . .	84
IV. THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE BUSTLE SILHOUETTE IN DRESS TO THE SOCIAL SITUATION FROM 1870 TO 1889. . . . .	87
Fashionable Dress from 1870 to 1889. . . . .	87
Typical dress of the period. . . . .	88
Changes in dress . . . . .	88
The Relationship of Change in Selected Objective Aspects of the Social Situation to Fashionable Dress. . . . .	98
Technological developments . . . . .	98
Economic developments. . . . .	101
Social stratification. . . . .	104
The family and status of women . . . . .	108
The Relationship of Change in Selected Subjective Aspects of the Social Situation to Fashionable Dress. . . . .	112
Wealth and materialism . . . . .	113
Acquired social position . . . . .	115
Realism. . . . .	116
Femininity and dependency. . . . .	117

The Relationship of Crises in the Social Situation to Fashionable Dress. . . . .	118
Crises in France . . . . .	119
Crises in the United States . . . . .	120
V. THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE FIRST TUBULAR SILHOUETTE IN DRESS TO THE SOCIAL SITUATION FROM 1890 TO 1907 . . .	122
Fashionable Dress from 1890 to 1907 . . . . .	123
Typical dress of the period . . . . .	123
Changes in dress . . . . .	126
Changes in the production of fashionable dress. .	130
The Relationship of Change in Selected Objective Aspects of the Social Situation to Fashionable Dress . . . . .	133
Technological developments. . . . .	133
Economic developments . . . . .	137
Social stratification . . . . .	139
The family and status of women. . . . .	141
The Relationship of Change in Selected Subjective Aspects of the Social Situation to Fashionable Dress . . . . .	145
Freedom and equality. . . . .	146
Femininity and coquetry . . . . .	147
Romanticism . . . . .	147
Relaxation of prudery . . . . .	148
Extravagance and snobbery . . . . .	149
Reform. . . . .	149
The Relationship of Crises in the Social Situation to Fashionable Dress. . . . .	150
VI. THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE SECOND TUBULAR SILHOUETTE IN DRESS TO THE SOCIAL SITUATION FROM 1908 TO 1929 . . .	152
Fashionable Dress from 1908 to 1929 . . . . .	152
The dress of 1910 . . . . .	153
The dress of 1914 . . . . .	155
The dress of 1916 . . . . .	155
The dress of 1924 . . . . .	157
The dress of 1928 . . . . .	159
The source of fashionable dress . . . . .	161

The Relationship of Change in Selected Objective Aspects of Social Change to Fashionable Dress. . .	163
Technological developments . . . . .	164
Economic developments. . . . .	167
Social stratification. . . . .	169
The family and status of women . . . . .	171
The Relationship of Change in Selected Subjective Aspects of the Social Situation to Fashionable Dress. . . . .	174
Freedom and equality . . . . .	175
Negation of femininity . . . . .	176
Restlessness and disillusionment . . . . .	177
Relaxation of moral standards. . . . .	177
The Relationship of Crises in the Social Situation to Fashionable Dress. . . . .	178
VII. THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE THIRD TUBULAR SILHOUETTE IN DRESS TO THE SOCIAL SITUATION FROM 1930 TO 1950. . .	181
Fashionable Dress from 1930 to 1950. . . . .	181
The dress of 1933. . . . .	182
The dress of 1940. . . . .	184
The dress of 1947. . . . .	186
The dress of 1950. . . . .	188
The Relationship of Change in Selected Objective Aspects of the Social Situation to Fashionable Dress. . . . .	188
Technological developments . . . . .	190
Economic developments. . . . .	193
Social stratification. . . . .	196
The family and status of women . . . . .	198
The Relationship of Change in Selected Subjective Aspects of the Social Situation to Fashionable Dress. . . . .	203
Equalization of the sexes. . . . .	203
Practicality and adaptability. . . . .	205
Informality. . . . .	206
Middle class orientation . . . . .	207
The Relationship of Crises in the Social Situation to Fashionable Dress . . . . .	208



CHAPTER	Page
VIII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS. . . . .	212
Summary. . . . .	214
Conclusions. . . . .	222
BIBLIOGRAPHY. . . . .	225
VITA. . . . .	236

# LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	Page
1. The Dress of 1850. . . . .	50
2. The Dress of 1863. . . . .	53
3. The Dress of 1870. . . . .	89
4. The Dress of 1875. . . . .	91
5. The Dress of 1880. . . . .	93
6. The Dress of 1886. . . . .	95
7. The Dress of 1890. . . . .	125
8. The Dress of 1896. . . . .	127
9. The Dress of 1900. . . . .	129
10. The Dress of 1905. . . . .	131
11. The Dress of 1910. . . . .	154
12. The Dress of 1914. . . . .	156
13. The Dress of 1916. . . . .	158
14. The Dress of 1924. . . . .	160
15. The Dress of 1928. . . . .	162
16. The Dress of 1933. . . . .	183
17. The Dress of 1940. . . . .	185
18. The Dress of 1947. . . . .	187
19. The Dress of 1950. . . . .	189

## ABSTRACT

This is a sociological analysis of fashion in women's dress and change in the socio-cultural environment to determine the relationship of fashion in dress to social change. The purpose of this study is to establish the nature and significance of this relationship and to test several hypotheses pertaining to fashion as a behavioral reaction to the social situation.

This study utilizes the three major concepts of the situational approach to an analysis of change introduced by W. I. Thomas. The concept of "situation," the concept of "definition of the situation," and the concept of "crisis" provide a framework for the observation and analysis of women's dress fashions as an adjustment to selected aspects of the social situation.

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Changes in fashion and changes in selected factors of the social situation were observed from the middle of the nineteenth century until 1950. This century, a representative period of social change in the United States, was divided into five intervals on the basis of distinctly different silhouettes in dress. An analysis of each of these periods was made to determine the relationship of fashionable dress to objective, subjective, and crisis aspects of the social situation.

Each of the intervals observed presented to the women of the era a distinctive socio-cultural situation. The dress of each

interval was expressive of the interpretation of the situation.

Changes in fashion were found to correspond to changes in technological and economic developments, changes in social stratification, and changes in the family and status of women. Alterations in fashionable dress were also found to correspond with changes in the definition of the situation and with crisis events of the times.

This study showed that within the conditions and the setting of the situation, women of each interval selected costumes which expressed their attitudes and assessment of the situation. The women of the mid-nineteenth century dressed to portray their dependence upon the male in society. Their wide sweeping skirts indicated helplessness and femininity. This definition of women's role was intensified during the interval fashionable dress was characterized by the hampering bustle. It was after 1890 that the situation for women changed sufficiently to permit a measure of freedom and activity. At the same time women began to wear fashionable dress which permitted freedom of movement. The achievement of equality during the early twentieth century presented a greater change in the situation for women. The fashion response was an adoption of straight and unfeminine dress designs in extreme interpretations. A change in attitude toward the desirability of maintaining equality with men led to a return to a more feminine interpretation in dress. Women of the mid-twentieth century seemed more willing to define their situation as an acknowledgment of their place in a man's world.

The general conclusions of this study are that fashion in women's dress shows a significant relationship to change in the

structure and functioning of designated social systems, and fashions are visual manifestations of attitudes and values which are a part of the social processes of western civilization. Fashion in dress provides a visual expressive interpretation of the social and psychological forces underlying the constant change of contemporary society.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Fashion in dress, which is essentially the sequence of changes in the mode and style of clothing worn over a period of time, has been observed as a unique phenomenon of our society and of Western civilization. The presence of fashion as a factor in our socio-cultural environment has been recognized by many social scientists. The writings of historians, economists, psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists include references to clothing and to the frequency of change in dress. Fashion, recognized as a potent social force, has been granted a significant position in the totality of our culture.

Fashion has been discussed in a variety of ways by the social scientists. Such treatment has ranged from a cursory dismissal of women's dress as merely subject to feminine caprice to a consideration of fashion as a phenomenon of deepest social significance. The broad range of opinions regarding dress fashions has led to various investigations. However, few scientists have conducted sufficient study to formulate a body of knowledge which would lead to an understanding of fashion and its place in our social world.

There has been sufficient interest in fashion in dress to bring about many ideas, speculation, and even theories about change in dress

styles and designs. Economists attribute change in fashion to the operation of economic forces. Thorstein Veblen, with his explanation of change in fashion as a result of changes in the production methods and increasing markets of an industrial society,<sup>1</sup> has made a contribution toward an understanding of fashion which to some is greater than he has been credited.<sup>2</sup> Psychologists look at fashion from the standpoint of the individual in a social setting. Through an analysis of individual attitudes and behavior conforming to the group, psychologists have hoped to gain insight into the nature of the larger problem of fashion change.<sup>3</sup> Historians have supported the belief that the larger events such as wars, revolutions, changes in power, and changes in government are instrumental in fashion change. There are scholars who express the idea that fashions reflect the unfolding of the events of their times, and express the "climate" of an era.<sup>4</sup> Sociologists are inclined to group fashion with fads and crazes as an aspect of collective behavior.<sup>5</sup> However, Edward Sapir, in

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<sup>1</sup>Thorstein B. Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class (New York: The Modern Library Inc., 1934), p. 167.

<sup>2</sup>Quentin Bell, On Human Finery (London: The Hogarth Press, 1947), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Estelle DeYoung Barr, "A Psychological Analysis of Fashion Motivation," Archives of Psychology, XXVI (June, 1934), 7.

<sup>4</sup>James Laver (ed.), Costume of the Western World (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), p. x.

<sup>5</sup>Richard T. LaPiere, Sociology (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1946), p. 527.

writing a definition of fashion in the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, states that, to him, changes in fashion depend upon "the prevailing culture and the social ideals which inform it."<sup>6</sup> In spite of such diversity of opinion and treatment, there is an almost unanimous expression of the desirability of a better understanding of fashion than is available at present.

Perhaps the most significant research in the area of change in dress has led to the conclusion that fashion is a social movement which is cyclical in nature. The study made by anthropologist Alfred L. Kroeber with Jane Richardson<sup>7</sup> and an investigation by Agnes Brooks Young,<sup>8</sup> writer and stage designer, present evidence of fashion change as based upon recurring cycles. There is lack of agreement in the timing and duration of these cycles in these two studies. There are also differences in the findings and observations made by the researchers. To most social scientists these discrepancies are overshadowed by the clear evidence of the recurring cycles of fashion in women's dress.<sup>9</sup>

The difficulties in understanding fashion and finding an explanation for change in women's dress has been frequently expressed.

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<sup>6</sup>Edward Sapir, "Fashion," Encyclopedia of Social Sciences (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), VI, 139-144.

<sup>7</sup>Jane Richardson and Alfred L. Kroeber, "On the Principle of Order in Civilization as Exemplified by Changes in Fashion," American Anthropologist, XXI (July-September, 1919), pp. 235-263.

<sup>8</sup>Agnes Brooks Young, Recurring Cycles of Fashion, 1760-1937 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937).

<sup>9</sup>Kimball Young, Social Psychology (3rd ed.; New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1956), p. 314.



Dr. Oskar Fischel and Max Von Boehn acknowledged in their book, Modes and Manners of the Nineteenth Century, that the tendency to designate fashion as influenced by the "spirit of the time" has not been satisfactorily explained. They stated that "the longer we study the question the more certain do we become that though we know the how, we shall never know the why."<sup>10</sup> This despair may have been justified at the beginning of the present century, but today such finality need not be accepted.

Fashion may be assumed to have an explanation. Robert M. MacIver makes the statement that "back of all our conscious activity, ... lies some concept of causation."<sup>11</sup> He goes on to say that often, "the causal scheme of things is too complex, too obscure, or too deep for us to fathom, and we have to content ourselves with descriptive recognition."<sup>12</sup> MacIver points out that we can sometimes only surmise the causal links which bind together a historical sequence of events. Through the consideration of things or events which belong together and resemblances that reveal like processes of development, it is possible to establish not causes but relationships. According to MacIver, "All our investigating is a search for relationships and all our science is the knowledge of systems of relations."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Oskar Fischel and Max Von Boehn, Modes and Manners of the Nineteenth Century (rev. ed.; London: J.M. Dent and Sons Limited, 1927), III, pp. 48-49.

<sup>11</sup>Robert M. MacIver, Social Causation (Ginn and Company, 1942), p. 5.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 100-101.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

This study is concerned with an investigation such as suggested by MacIver. This is a sociological analysis of fashion and its relationship to the socio-cultural environment of which it is a part. The hypothesis is suggested that the factor of change in women's dress fashions shows a relationship to change in the structure and functioning of designated social systems. This investigation will examine fashion and social change in order to find the nature and extent of this relationship.

### Need for Study

This study is an effort to contribute to a long-felt need for a better understanding of the ceaseless change which characterizes the dress of women in the Western world. There are many ideas and opinions regarding fashion. There are some explanations for change in dress. Few, however, have been supported by sufficient study to warrant their acceptance. Even the existing theories have never been well formulated. It is hoped that this sociological analysis of fashion in dress will provide information and a basis for an interpretation of the nature of change, not only in dress, but also in the social structure of contemporary society.

There has been a growing recognition of the need for more sociological investigation into the nature of change. Changes in behavior, cultural change, and social change have become increasingly interesting to present-day sociologists as foci for study. However, there still remains a real need for further research in these areas

which would lead to adequate definition and conceptualization.<sup>14</sup>

Sociologists have more recently begun to emphasize the subjective aspects of change. Increased stress has been placed upon the operation of values, attitudes, and meanings as basic to behavior in general and in the whole process of social change.<sup>15</sup> The need for research which utilizes the subjective factors in change and recognizes the importance of social values is becoming more evident.

Researchers are also aware of the difficulties encountered in determining and measuring change. There is a need for demonstrating the value of the few indices which are available as devices for measuring change in attitudes and values. Fashion, along with changes in customs and modes of living, may be considered one of the means whereby change may be determined.<sup>16</sup> Its usefulness in the interpretation of the subjective aspects of change remains to be demonstrated.

There has been an expressed need for more sociological research in the areas of clothing and dress design. Such research should lead to the development of useful theory in fashion and dress. The availability of sociological theory would be of great assistance to workers in the various disciplines who are interested in the different aspects

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<sup>14</sup>Alvin Boskoff, "Social Change: Major Problems in the Emergence of Theoretical and Research Foci," Modern Sociological Theory in Continuity and Change, eds. Howard Becker and Alvin Boskoff (New York: The Dryden Press, 1957), p. 263.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p.268.

<sup>16</sup>Robert M. MacIver and Charles H. Page, Society (New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1949), p. 586.

of dress. Changes in dress can be easily seen, but they have not been so easily interpreted. Techniques of interpretation, evaluation, and even prediction of changes in fashion would have considerable value if they could be developed.

Especially interested in the availability of a better understanding of fashion and a usable theory of change in dress are the members of the clothing industry. Many manufacturers and retailers of contemporary clothing would like to have concise information about fashion and fashion trends. Leading merchandisers admit that success and profits in the industry are dependent upon rather unreliable guesses and hunches.<sup>17</sup>

The economic importance of fashion to the nation and the amount of money involved in the clothing industry may be indicated by the estimation that expenditures for women's clothing items such as coats, suits, and dresses amount to eleven billion dollars annually. According to Dr. Lazare Teper, research chief of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the estimated amount of annual clothing expenditure reaches fifteen billion if bags, shoes, hosiery, and other small items are included.<sup>18</sup> These amounts indicate somewhat the economic need for a better understanding of change in dress in contemporary society.

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<sup>17</sup>Stanley H. Marcus, "Fashion Is My Business," Atlantic Monthly, CLXXXII (December, 1948), pp. 43-46.

<sup>18</sup>Sylvia Porter, "Your Money's Worth," The Times-Picayune /New Orleans, Louisiana/, October 21, 1960, Sec. 3, p. 13.

Economists deplore the lack of facts and information about fashion. Paul H. Nystrom in his book, Economics of Fashion, makes a plea for the substitution of a "bit of science for the prevailing mystery regarding fashion."<sup>19</sup> He points out that manufacturers and merchandisers could work with fashion movements, rather than independently or actually against fashion trends, if more information were available.

A recognition of the need for clarification, definition, and conceptualization of usable theories of fashion in dress prompts this study. It is an effort to increase the amount of information and understanding of change which might lead to the formulation of such a theory. It is a contribution to a problem which is much more extensive than can be encompassed by a single study.

### Objectives

The major objective of this study is to derive a better understanding of individual and collective behavior within a socio-cultural setting as expressed through change in women's dress. The observation of style and fashion in dress over a period of time should show the presence of a relationship between changes in dress and changes in society. It is the purpose of this study to establish the nature and significance of this relationship. An analysis of the relationship between changes in dress and changes in the socio-cultural environment may lead to a better explanation of fashion than is currently available.

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<sup>19</sup>Paul H. Nystrom, Economics of Fashion (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1928), p. 17.

It is hoped that this study will show that women's manner of dress is indicative of individual and group analysis of the situation of which it is a part. The hypothesis is suggested that style and dress fashions are manifestations of attitudes and values which are part of the social processes of Western civilization. It remains to be shown whether fashion in dress is a behavioral reaction to the social structures and processes of the historical periods during which specific dress designs were worn.

There are many questions which arise from a consideration of fashion in dress as a factor in the social developments of Western society. There have been many questions concerning the agents responsible for change in dress. Individuals, designers, and producers have been assigned various roles in the fluctuations of fashionable dress. The significance of their roles is still in doubt. There has been greater interest in the question of how to predict changes in fashion. These are only some of the problems still faced by those interested in clothing and dress.

This study will not attempt to answer these questions as much as to lead to a better understanding of change as revealed by fashion in dress. The research devoted to fashion and clothing behavior is relatively small. It is a field which has been subjected more to speculation than actual research.

It is hoped that this investigation, which is a pioneer study of its type, will lead to some clarification and theoretical formulation in the areas of clothing behavior and fashion. It may also offer

a stimulus to further research in search of an explanation of the place and purpose of fashion in dress in the socio-cultural complexity of our civilization.

### Scope of the Study

This study is based upon an observation of change in dress and change in social processes over the time span of one hundred years. An understanding of fashion and changes in dress necessitates the observation of the sequence of alterations and variations which characterized the designs and forms of costumes over a period of time. The analysis of any dynamic factor involves modifications through time.<sup>20</sup> The processes of social change are also meaningful in a time sequence. Comparisons of earlier with later social situations lend meaningfulness to an analysis of social change.

The historical period selected for this study of fashion in dress is the extent of time from 1850 to 1950. It is a period long enough to permit the comparison of earlier and later developments. This century was selected as encompassing a series of significant changes in dress and in social life. This period might be profitably examined in view of a search for a relationship between dress fashions and social change.

This study is limited to women's dress. Men of the nineteenth century had adopted a style of dress which permitted only slight variation. The dark, conservative suit had become almost universally

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<sup>20</sup>Kimball Young, Sociology (2nd. ed., New York: American Book Company, 1949), p. 59.

worn by the mid-century male. A similar suit has continued to be the accepted apparel for men until the present time. The clothing for women, in contrast, became more varied and more expressive of changes of fashion. Women's dress is seemingly more responsive to change. Alterations in women's dress have been more obvious than those found in men's clothing. The changes in men's wear were less perceptible. For these reasons, women's fashions in dress were considered as offering a more profitable area for study.

The consideration of social change over a century of time presents a much more complex problem. Social change is a process responsive to many types of stimuli. According to MacIver and Page, social change involves alterations in natural, man-made, and cultural aspects of our civilization.<sup>21</sup> It is not only change in each one of these aspects which influences the social order, but also the interdependence of each upon the other. This creates a change of relationships within a structure of extreme complexity. Alvin Boskoff defines social change as "the intelligible process in which we can discover significant alterations in the structure and functioning of determinate social systems."<sup>22</sup> The interlocking of the many factors underlying social change creates difficulty in determining those alterations which are significant.

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<sup>21</sup>MacIver and Page, op. cit., p. 508.

<sup>22</sup>Boskoff, loc. cit.



The selection of a limited group of factors which show significant alteration in the total complexity of social change is almost a necessity. The choice of a few aspects of social change would not eliminate other elements of the totality, but selectivity would make the comparison of change more manageable and meaningful.

This study, therefore, will emphasize those aspects of the socio-cultural environment which have a bearing upon the lives and behavior of women in our society.<sup>23</sup> Those aspects which have been selected as significant to this study are: technological developments, economic developments, change in social classes or stratification, and changes in family life and family living. Alterations and modifications in these aspects of the socio-cultural environment changed the situation for women during the century under consideration.

The aspects of social change which are most influential in the modification of the social situation for women are considered also as influential in the choice of clothing designs. Women's dress shows the effects of such changes through their choice of costumes.

Technological developments have had an effect upon women's clothing through the development of new techniques, new inventions, modes of production, transportation, and communication. New sources of materials and fibers have created new textiles to use in the

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<sup>23</sup>MacIver and Page, op. cit., pp. 185-186.

making of clothes. The availability of ready-to-wear clothing and the distribution of garments greatly influenced women's clothing behavior. Technological developments also affected levels of living. Electricity, power, and machinery for the home produced appliances and labor saving devices for women. These products of technology affected the type of clothing worn within the home and during the increased amount of time spent away from the home.

Economic developments have had an effect upon the general economy of the nation. The cycles of depression and prosperity have had a bearing upon the situation in which women find themselves. The economic aspects of the social environment influenced the amount of money spent and, more importantly, the amount of money earned. The total economic situation has had a bearing upon the clothing worn at a particular time.

Changes in the class structure have had a particular effect upon the selection of clothing and the influence of fashion. Greater mobility has broken down social barriers to fashion.<sup>24</sup> The status and role of women have also been influenced by alterations in the social classes. Changes in stratification may prove to be one of the more instrumental factors influencing change in women's dress.

Changes in families and family living have influenced clothing behavior during the past century. The age at marriage, size of families, rate of marriage, and rate of divorce have shown changes

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

which influenced women. The role of the homemaker has been altered considerably. Activities inside and outside the home increased. Women holding jobs outside the home increased in number, especially married women. Leisure and recreational activities centered about the home showed changes which affected the choice of clothing.

These aspects of the totality of the socio-cultural environment have been selected as being most influential in the emergence of fashions in dress throughout the century being studied. It is necessary to select from the total situation involved some aspects which might be examined. An effort to establish a relationship between one phenomenon and one or more other phenomena is manageable, whereas the consideration of the whole would be meaningless.<sup>25</sup>

The limitations of this study were necessitated by the complexity of the problem. The selection of a few factors of change and the observation of only women's clothing during a specified century of time has resulted in a manageable study. Further research may shed more light on the problem through an examination of the many other facets of fashion and social change.

#### Definition of Terms

The terminology encountered in reference to fashion and social change is varied and without consistency. Historians, psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and fashion experts tend to define terms according to their own interests and emphases. There is sufficient agreement, however, for the development of suitable definitions

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<sup>25</sup>MacIver, Social Causation, op. cit., p. 41.

which may be used for the purposes of this study. Terms applying to the design and structure of women's dress will be presented for clarity and readability. These latter terms may be more descriptive and will conform more to the terminology used by costume and fashion writers.

Fashion. A definition of fashion may be derived from the various treatments which have been given to the topic. Few writers define fashion; they discuss the qualities of fashion. The most frequently mentioned characteristic of fashion is that of change. Turner and Killian in their book, Collective Behavior, discuss fashion as a "process centered about the diffusion of changes in taste."<sup>26</sup> They point out that tastes change as well as behavior. Fashion, to them, is a continuous process of change in that each style follows the preceding and replaces it with continuous change. Paul M. Gregory, economist, terms fashion a "chameleon--everchanging."<sup>27</sup> He identifies fashion as the style or distinctive mode prevailing at any given time, but one which is constantly changing. Agnes Brooks Young writes that "Fashion inherently involves continuous change and general acceptance of change."<sup>28</sup> Alfred Kroeber writes in a similar vein, "fashion is in a constant state of seemingly aimless vibrancy and shift; that is

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<sup>26</sup>Ralph H. Turner and Lewis M. Killian, Collective Behavior (New Jersey, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1957), p. 215.

<sup>27</sup>Paul M. Gregory, "A Theory of Purposeful Obsolescence," Southern Economic Journal, XIV (July, 1947), p. 148.

<sup>28</sup>Agnes Brooks Young, op. cit., p. 132.

the essential property of fashion."<sup>29</sup> Kroeber also derived from his research the deduction that fashion changes at a rate which tends to be constant. Carrie Hall adds her observation in her statement in her book, From Hoopskirts to Nudity. "Fashion is ephemeral, changing--a thing of so little stability that one reads the Morning News to see what may be the fashion of the moment."<sup>30</sup>

C. Willett Cunningham, an English scholar who writes of feminine costume, describes fashion as "a taste shared by a large number of people for a short space of time."<sup>31</sup> He also expresses the observation that the feminine attitude toward fashion is the wish to imitate the appearance and conduct of those in the same social group.<sup>32</sup> Cunningham's opinion is quite similar to Gabriel de Tarde's definition of fashion as the "imitation of contemporaries."<sup>33</sup>

Fashion has also been considered as related to custom. Edward Sapir writes in the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, "Custom marks the highroad of human interrelationships while fashion may be looked upon as the endless departure from and return to the highroad."<sup>34</sup> To Sapir, fashion seems to dictate variations in the customs which are reflective

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<sup>29</sup>Kroeber, Style and Civilization, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

<sup>30</sup>Carrie Hall, From Hoopskirts to Nudity (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1938), p. 20.

<sup>31</sup>C. Willett Cunningham, Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century (New York: The McMillan Company, 1936), p. 2.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>33</sup>Gabriel de Tarde, The Laws of Imitation (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1903), p. 343.

<sup>34</sup>Sapir, op. cit., p. 139.

of personal choice as well as the need for novelty and conformity. MacIver discusses fashion in a similar way. He defines fashion as "the socially approved sequence of variation on a customary theme."<sup>35</sup> MacIver points to the variations of fashion as occurring in a more or less regular sequence or cycle but within the custom-prescribed general type.

Social-psychologist Kimball Young defines fashion in relation to behavior. Fashion, to Young, is that which is accepted at the current time. Broader than usage for manner of dress, fashion has a wide variety of social manifestations. Young considers fashion as indicative of status and social position in a particular society.<sup>36</sup>

From these discussions of the different characteristics of fashion, a definition which would be applicable and meaningful for the purposes of this study has been compiled. Fashion in dress may be defined as follows: Fashion is the characteristic expression or taste in clothing which is accepted and shared by the majority of people at a particular time and is subject to ceaseless change within the bounds of custom over a period of time.

Style. Style is a term which is closely akin to fashion and equally nebulous in usage and definition. Kimball Young suggests that style as applied to fashion is the "characteristic mode of expression, construction, or execution of any art."<sup>37</sup> It is that which is

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<sup>35</sup>MacIver and Page, op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>36</sup>Kimball Young, Social Psychology, op. cit., p. 310.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

distinctive in manner whether applied to an individual or to a society. Kroeber gives a similar interpretation of style, in view of his use of the term in his book, Style and Civilizations. He observes that the meanings of style have become many. Originally referring to an individual's distinctive manner of execution, style now carries its social, more than its individual, denotation.<sup>38</sup> Kroeber notes that style may refer to much more than dress, but in ordinary usage it has become closely associated with fashion and dress.

Style, as related to fashion, may be defined as a characteristic manner of dress which is expressive of a particular individual or group of people living within a certain time and environment. It refers to form and manner of dress rather than specific content and detail.

Social Change. Sociologists have contributed various interpretations of social change. It is difficult to find agreement as to the nature and reasons for social change because of its complexity and illusiveness. It has been a topic in which an increasing amount of interest has brought new research and new interpretations.

William F. Ogburn presented a classic handling of social change in his book, Social Change. He tends to designate social change as the evolution of mechanisms of association. To Ogburn, social evolution may be described in psychological terms such as gregariousness,

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<sup>38</sup>Kroeber, Style and Civilizations, op. cit., pp.3-7.

association and capacity to respond to social stimuli. It should not be limited to psychological mechanisms, but should include a large part of the evolution of culture. The evolution of social organizations and social ways of behavior as observed in religion, art, law, and custom were included by Ogburn in his treatment of social change.<sup>39</sup>

Ogburn's handling of social change is still referred to by contemporary sociologists. John Eric Nordskog of the University of Southern California adds agreement with the earlier work when writing his book, Social Change, in 1960. He makes the observation that "Social change means simply the process of becoming different in any sense."<sup>40</sup>

MacIver discusses social change as a process responsive to many types of change. He designates social change as due to "changes in the man-made conditions of living, to changes in the attitudes and beliefs of men, and to changes that go back beyond human control to the biological and the physical nature of things."<sup>41</sup>

Alvin Boskoff discusses social change as significant alterations in both structure and functioning of social systems. As a practical definition he writes, "social change presents itself to the sociologist as collective deviations from established patterns."<sup>42</sup> Social

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<sup>39</sup>William F. Ogburn, Social Change (New York: B.W. Huebsch, Inc., 1922), p. 59.

<sup>40</sup>John Eric Nordskog, Social Change (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1960), p. 1.

<sup>41</sup>MacIver and Page, op. cit., p. 508.

<sup>42</sup>Boskoff, op. cit., p. 289.



change, to Boskoff, is the process which accompanies the functioning of a society. It is a necessary part of the existence of any social group.

Social change may well be defined by different sociologists in a variety of ways. The essence of any society is its constant state of flux and activity which results in change.

The structural areas of dress design. The structural areas of dress design are the major parts of a dress or garment worn by women. Terms for the covering of the upper part of the body are: blouse, bodice, and waist. Sleeves cover the arms. They are joined to the bodice at the shoulder and may terminate at any point along the arm. The lower part of the body in Western dress is covered traditionally by the skirt. The skirt hangs from the waist in varying lengths and degrees of fullness. Pants and trousers, usually masculine wear in our society, are worn by women. The skirt is dominant, however, and is characteristic of women's dress.

The structural lines of dress design. The structural lines of dress design are the lines created by the outlines and the joinings of the structural areas of the dress. These coincide with the cutting and shaping which must be done to adapt a flat fabric to the rounded contours of the feminine figure. The neckline refers to the contour of the opening around the neck. It may be decorated by means of a collar or merely finished. The joinings of the major areas are the waistline, the shoulderline, and the armseye. The latter term, the armseye, refers to the point of joining the sleeves to the blouse at

the shoulder. The skirtline refers to the cut and fall of the skirt. Points of the body which are also utilized in the fitting of fabric and influence the resulting design are the shoulderline, bustline, and hipline.

Silhouette. The silhouette is the basic outline or contour of a costume which is created by the shaping and handling of the major areas of the design of the dress. The characteristic dress of Western civilization, based upon the blouse and skirt, may outline and emphasize the contours of the human body. The silhouette may also extend, hide, or even distort parts of the figure.

The work of Kroeber, Agnes Brooks Young, and others points to the use of only a few basic types of silhouettes in Western dress. These basic silhouettes are called: the bell, the bustle or draped, and the tubular silhouette.

The bell silhouette. The bell silhouette is dominated by a skirt which is extended into a wide bell-like shape. Accompanied by a fitted bodice with a small waistline, the skirt reaches its maximum circumference at the hem. The figure stands in the middle of the encompassing skirt fullness which falls evenly to the floor.

The bustle silhouette. The bustle or draped silhouette is characterized by skirt fullness concentrated in the rear of the body. Excessive amounts of fullness are either pulled up or draped into intricate puffs and manipulations. The figure stands in front of the fullness and may be considerably distorted by the exaggerated use of material.

The tubular silhouette. The tubular silhouette follows the contours of the human figure more closely. The structural areas are simple in cut. The fabric hangs from the shoulders to the hem along the contours of the body. Some interpretations minimize the contours of the feminine figure so that a straight, slender, tube-like shape is achieved.

Details of dress. There are numerous details of dress which were important at various times in the past. Collars, cuffs, belts, and other decorative features varied in cut and name with the different periods. These will be identified or illustrated when mentioned in this study. The use of specific cuts and dressmaker details will be kept to a minimum. They are not as important to this study as the more general features of dress design.

#### Method of Study

Frame of reference and approach. This study approaches women's dress from the standpoint that fashion is expressive of individual and collective behavior. Choice of design in clothing, which denotes the acceptance of fashion, is indicative of behavioral reactions to the conditions which precipitate change. Clothing choices may prove to be reactions to attitudes, values, and beliefs which operate in a social situation according to custom and tradition. Rather than seeking an explanation for fashion in the larger political, economical, and social movements, the consideration of individual and group reaction to significant factors in the socio-cultural environment may also be rewarding.

This study utilizes the historical approach in the observation of fashion and society over a period of time. Change is meaningful only through comparison. The historical approach permits the analysis of change from one period to another. Comparisons can be made of earlier with later periods. The changes in fashion are easily dated and are clearly visible in representative illustrations. Social changes are less easily detected, but comparisons can show the effects and manifestations of change. Such treatment can move the investigation from the descriptive to the analytical level. Boskoff suggests that the "how" and the "why" of social change might be approached from a comparative treatment of earlier with later situations.<sup>43</sup> The comparison of historical periods might prove helpful in the approach to similar questions regarding fashion in women's dress.

A pertinent frame of reference to assist in the interpretation of fashion as a behavioral reaction to change in the socio-cultural environment is W. I. Thomas' concept of the situation. His view that the task of social science is "to understand and interpret the phenomena as they are revealed in behavior"<sup>44</sup> lends itself to this investigation of fashion.

The subjective aspects of human behavior were considered very important by Thomas. The collaboration of Thomas with Florian Znaniecki in the writing of the Polish Peasant led to the combination

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 265-266.

<sup>44</sup>Edmund H. Volkart, ed., Social Behavior and Personality: Contributions of W. I. Thomas to Theory and Social Research (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1951), p. 4.

of Thomas' concept of attitudes with Znaniecki's concept of values.<sup>45</sup> This collaboration gave a foundation for the search for "laws" of social change. Their search for "laws" was abandoned, but the importance of attitudes and values as contributing factors toward situational behavior is still felt in any analysis of social change.<sup>46</sup>

Since, in Thomas' concept, concrete activity can be observed as the solution of a situation, the situation must be considered subjectively. The "definition of the situation," which is tantamount to Thomas' theory, is the link which connects experience and adjustive behavior to the situation. The way of life into which an individual is thrust is composed of definitions of situations embodied into codes, rules, and traditions. Thomas' view permits the individual to react to situations in a way which coincides with group norms. The influence of the group upon the individual is not minimized.<sup>47</sup>

This view that the individual is permitted definitions of the situations in which he finds himself, is expressed by Volkart in his interpretation of Thomas' work. There are many opportunities for individual reaction to social situations. Volkart writes that this "leads to the conclusion that social behavior in a single culture is highly variable, within limits, and herein are found the roots of social change."<sup>48</sup> This statement points to the observation that there

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<sup>45</sup>Florian Znaniecki, Cultural Sciences (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1952), p. 192.

<sup>46</sup>Volkart, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 4-10.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

exists some degree of change in all societies.

Thomas' concept of the situation and the definition of the situation provides a suitable framework for an analysis of fashion. Choice of wearing apparel may be considered a personal interpretation of a situation, but choices are made within the prescribed general type determined by custom. This corresponds to the sociological interpretation of fashion as being related to custom. Fashion dictates the variation in custom. But custom sets the limits within which change may operate.<sup>49</sup>

Another aspect of Western society which is influential to an analysis of fashion is the presence of new stimuli. New stimuli may affect definitions of the situation. Thomas' concept of the "crisis" was his method of coping with the disruptive elements which affected the definitions of situations made by individuals and groups. Behavior which is a reaction to significant events or innovation often appears to disrupt the smoothness of social life. Thomas recognized such influences as the most significant of human experience. Reactions to "crises" often affect the rate and direction of social change. The reaction to a crisis evokes new responses, breaks down customary reactions, and is often a major factor in the course of new developments.<sup>50</sup>

An analysis of fashion may be approached from the standpoint of an examination of those influences which appear to disrupt habits or alter the habitual situation. Crises affect the definitions of individuals and of groups. A crisis is a threat, a challenge, and a call

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<sup>49</sup>MacIver and Page, op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>50</sup>Volkart, op. cit., pp. 10-13.

to new action.<sup>51</sup> Reactions may take many forms. In addition to change in social behavior, change in fashion may be indicative of change in the definition of the situation. Variations from accustomed interaction patterns, which is the heart of social change, may be found to correspond to variations in women's dress.

The hypothesis that dress fashions provide a means whereby social change may be detected or further identified may be suggested by the fact that fashion changes are easily seen. Fashions can be dated. Changes in fashion are quite apparent through observation.<sup>52</sup> Fashion might be considered as one of the detectable variations of the consequences of change in the social system.

This study attempts to link change in women's dress, or fashion, with social change by considering fashion as an alteration within an accepted pattern of behavior. W. I. Thomas' concepts will be used as a theoretical framework for an analysis of selected aspects of fashion and social change. Thomas' concept of the "situation," the "definition of the situation," and his concept of the "crisis" provide a methodological approach to the analysis of social behavior as expressed through women's dress fashions. Change in fashion may prove to be indicative of significant social change.

The hypotheses presented in this study are: that the factor of change in women's dress fashions shows a relationship to change in the structure and functioning of designated social systems; that style

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>MacIver, Social Causation, op. cit., p. 112.

and fashion are manifestations of attitudes and values which are part of the social processes of Western civilization; and that dress fashions provide a means whereby social change may be detected or further identified. This study will be devoted to a development of these hypotheses through a demonstration of selected aspects of change in fashion in dress and social change during the historical period from 1850 to 1950.

Design of study and study procedure. This study utilizes a historical treatment of the changes in fashion and changes in significant aspects of the socio-cultural setting of life in the United States during a century of the past. The hundred years from 1850 to 1950 were divided into periods which were marked by significant alterations in dress design. The determination of a relationship between fashion and social change was approached through an analysis of fashion as a behavioral reaction to the social situation of each of the periods. W. I. Thomas' situational concepts were used as a basis for the analysis of fashion and behavior of a social nature.

Changes in dress fashions were ascertained from illustrations and descriptions of costumes worn during the selected one hundred years. Fashion manuals and magazines were available. Many historians have included descriptions of costumes in their historic treatment of the past. Specialists in the history of costume have also provided a large amount of source material. Costume and fashion have been of sufficient interest as social and artistic expressions to warrant the recording of a considerable amount of material concerning women's wearing apparel.



Typical and representative costumes were selected to show the dress worn at significant points during the century from 1850 to 1950. These were sketched to incorporate the dominant features of fashion worn at a particular time. The illustrations, which are original drawings, show the type of dress worn for daytime occasions. They are representative of costumes worn by the majority of women for the usual activities of the day.<sup>53</sup> The unusual, the extreme, and the special-occasion costumes were not included. The sketches show the dresses with hats, footwear, and accessories to give a complete picture of the costume features at significant points of time during the century.

The illustrations of representative costumes were drawn to scale on figures of normal proportions. A grid behind each of the figures indicates the normal or average proportional height of seven and one-half head units.<sup>54</sup> The grid is a square; so that relative heights and widths are readily seen. Horizontal lines within the square indicate the normal positions of the structural parts of the body. Vertical lines placed equi-distant from the center line designate relative widths of the figure and structural areas of the costumes.

The horizontal lines of the grid indicate the placement of those elements of fashion which undergo change. Waistlines, necklines, hiplines, and lengths of sleeves and skirts are moved in a

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<sup>53</sup>A. B. Young, op. cit., p. 203.

<sup>54</sup>Christine Schmuck and Virginia Jewel, Fashion Illustration (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1937), pp. 27-28.

vertical direction. The placement of such lines to correspond with the normal structure of the body and the movement to which these lines are subjected can be detected by comparison with the lines of the grids behind the costumed figures.

The widths of structural areas and lines in dress design are indicated by means of intersecting vertical lines. The exaggeration, extension, and minimization of parts of the figure and the costume also can be seen through the comparison of each costume with the lines of the background grid. These grid lines show the extent of change in dress design from one point in time to another when the figures are compared.

Social change lacks the visual aspect which characterizes change in dress design. Fashion change can be seen and dated rather specifically. The selection of significant periods for the study of change was therefore based upon periods and points of change in dress design.

The century under study, the years from 1850 to 1950, was divided into five periods. Three of these periods were based upon the dominance of one of the three basic silhouettes of Western dress design. They correspond in a general way to the long range pattern of fashion change devised by Richardson and Kroeber and to Agnes Brooks Young's use of the three basic silhouettes in the cyclical analysis of change in fashion. However, the extent and rapidity of change within the basic silhouette which was maintained from 1890 to 1950, necessitated a division based upon changes within the dominant silhouette.

The five divisions of the century to be studied are as follows: the years 1850 to 1869, 1870 to 1889, 1890 to 1907, 1908 to 1929, and 1930 to 1950. The first period, 1850 to 1869, was dominated by the bell-shaped silhouette. The second span of time, from 1870 to 1889, was characterized by the draped or bustle silhouette. This basic form appeared in numerous variations throughout the period. The third type of silhouette, the tubular shape which follows the natural contour of the human figure, was initiated before 1900 and maintained throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Fashions were characterized by alterations of design lines and structural areas during these years rather than a change of silhouette. From 1890 to 1907 the dominant design was that of the full length skirt and slim, close fitting contour. The years from 1908 to 1929 were marked by fluctuations in the placement of the waistline and the length of the skirt. Also characteristic of this period was the attempt to minimize the rounded contours of the feminine figure. The twenty years from 1930 to 1950 were marked by dress designs which restored and stressed feminine features. The waistline was replaced at the normal position on the figure. Lengths and fullnesses of the skirts were varied considerably during this interval.

These five periods were each characterized by dress designs which were distinctive in line and silhouette. They are also periods designated by a point of change in the fashion trend. The termination of a fashion form and the beginning of a new fashion coincide with the delineation of these periods.

An analysis of each of these periods was made to determine the relationship of fashion to social change. The totality of the socio-cultural situation was recognized, but only those factors considered most influential upon the behavior of women were included. In accordance with W. I. Thomas' situational concept as a basis for behavioral analysis, changes brought about by crises, changes in the definition of the situation, and changes of objective aspects of the social situation were observed and described. The objective aspects of social change included only the technological and economic developments, changes in the social class structure, and changes in family life. These factors were selected as most significant for this study.

The determination of change in the structure and functioning of social systems is much more difficult than an observation of change in fashion. Social change is less precise, and the visual aspects of change in dress design are lacking completely. However, there are significant alterations which can be detected and described in each of the aspects of social change selected for study.

Technological developments during the century under consideration involved the adaptation of new sources of power, the utilization of new materials, and new inventions. The introduction of significant discoveries and devices may be dated. The effects of such innovations may be observed and described.

Economic developments are revealed by indices of prosperity and levels of living of the populace. The century studied was marked by steadily increasing prosperity, but reflected the fluctuations of a money and power economy.

Changes in the social class structure were observed in their relationship to shifts in wealth and power. The accompanying changes in prestige and models for imitation were noted especially for this consideration of fashion.

Changes in the family and the resultant status of women were substantiated through census figures relating to marriage, divorce, size of family, and the number of women working outside the home. More subjective aspects of family living may be observed through the type of housing, responsibilities, and activities carried on in the home.

The procedure followed in this study was designed to present the significant aspects of social change and to effect a comparison of change in dress and change of a social nature. The determination of the relationship of fashion in women's dress to social change is the major objective of this research.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF AVAILABLE LITERATURE

The available literature reveals a great awareness of the importance of the study of social change. Fashion and changes of design in dress have also been of interest but have not been subjected to as much research. Social scientists have suspected a relationship between fashions in dress and the social systems in which they exist. However, relatively few scientific studies have been made to establish the nature and consequences of such a relationship.

Alfred L. Kroeber, anthropologist, is one scientist who has done much and has influenced others to study fashion. His work exhibits his interest in fashion as a social phenomenon of the past and the present. Kroeber has developed the thesis that an understanding of complex civilizations may be derived from fashions. He feels that dress fashions lend themselves to analysis in that they can be dated and measured. Generalizations about fashions in dress can be stated precisely and supported by objective evidence. These qualities of fashion have been utilized by Kroeber in his studies of civilizations.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Alfred L. Kroeber, Style and Civilizations (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1957), pp. 2-7.

Kroeber became interested in fashion in women's dress as one of the aspects of pattern which give culture its coherence. His interpretation of fashion was based upon "style," which embodied the meaning of doing things in a definite manner through some specific method or plan of operation. This, according to Kroeber, would lead to a basic pattern or style within which fashion changes would operate consistently. He felt that although fashion changes represent a sort of restlessness and innovation, they nevertheless operated with rhythmic regularity.<sup>2</sup>

Kroeber's article, "On the Principle of Order in Civilization as Exemplified by Changes in Fashion," reports the findings of rhythmic and symmetrical patterns of change over a period of time.<sup>3</sup> He studied clothing as represented in fashion magazines from the year 1844 until 1919. The study utilized a measurement of selected portions of women's evening gowns. The measurements were four lengths and four widths which referred to the figure as a whole and disregarded trimmings. The measurements were made at the following points: total length of the figure from the center of the mouth to the top of the toe, distance from the mouth to the bottom of the skirt, distance from the mouth to the minimum diameter across the waist, distance from the mouth to the middle of the neckline edge in front, diameter of the skirt at its hem or base, maximum diameter of skirt at any point above

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<sup>2</sup>Alfred L. Kroeber, Anthropology (revised edition; New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1948), pp. 323-333.

<sup>3</sup>Alfred L. Kroeber, "On the Principle of Order in Civilization as Exemplified by Changes in Fashion," American Anthropologist, XXI (July-September, 1919), 235.

the base, minimum diameter in the region of the waist, and the width of the décolletage or neckline at the shoulders. Ten figures for each calendar year were selected at random for these measurements. The absolute measurements were converted into percentage ratios to the length of the entire figure. The percentages for each measure were arranged for each year and averages were brought together into a summary tabulation. These summary averages were then plotted on charts. Kroeber was able to detect from these data a rhythmic quality in the changes appearing in the lengths and widths of women's dresses. He also was impressed by the largeness of the lapses of time involved in these changes. The extent of duration of the symmetrical curves which appeared was from one-third of a century to one and one-half centuries.<sup>4</sup>

Kroeber reported his conclusions regarding change in civilization which had been derived from his study of fashion by stating "the fact of regularity in social change is the primary inference from our phenomena."<sup>5</sup> He points to the existence of tendencies which transcend the personalities of individuals. These tendencies, Kroeber says, are social forces. He writes, "the principle of civilizational determinism scores as against individual randomness."<sup>6</sup> The study of dress fashions leads Kroeber to the conclusion that,

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 257.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 261.



The super-organic or super-psychic or super-individual that we call civilization appears to have an existence, an order, and a causality as objective and as determinable as those of the subpsychic or inorganic.<sup>7</sup>

This quantitative approach by Kroeber may be criticized by many as being too mechanistic. The techniques employed fail to grasp the essentials which may not be so measurable. However, Kroeber's research has illustrated the utilization of fashion in dress as a method for studying civilizations.

Kroeber did a later study with Jane Richardson which consisted of an analysis of three centuries of women's dress fashions. This study demonstrated that there was a correlation between the near regularity in the periodicities of dress and general conditions of socio-cultural events.<sup>8</sup> Dress fashions were shown to be relatively steady and tranquil during a period of social stability, but they fluctuated rapidly during periods of tension and political unrest. There was seemingly a connection between the relatively placid and the relatively turbulent periods of fashion change and comparable periods of the larger events of history.

The methods used in this study were also quantitative. Measurements were taken as in the previous study. The year-by-year variability of dress fashions was extracted and used to determine the statistical standard of deviation. Periods of high and low variability were calculated from this standard deviation. The method of the

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>8</sup>Jane Richardson and Alfred L. Kroeber, Three Centuries of Women's Dress Fashions, A Quantitative Analysis (Anthropological Records 5:2. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1940), p. 111.

moving average for five years was compared with the simple average for one year. This yielded a second measure for instability of dress style.

This study demonstrates that there exist fairly long periods of high variability alternating with periods of low variability of fashion.<sup>9</sup> In general these periods of high variability tended to coincide with periods of socio-political tension and insecurity. Kroeber feels that we need not doubt that the unrest of the times is communicated to fashions. Fashions become unsettled when social conditions are unsettled. The tensions precipitated in dress fashions were shown by departures from the basic pattern of dress style which prevails in times which are free of tension. Socio-political tensions, according to Richardson's and Kroeber's research, seem to coincide with disturbances in the stability of fashions.

Kroeber used his research on dress fashions in a later work. His book, Style and Civilizations, presents his findings on fashion as a basis for generalizations in regard to style in the fine arts. Kroeber felt that the best foundation for a discussion of style in fine arts could be derived from his conclusions upon dress fashions. Styles in dress were used as a testing device for general stylistic changes. Through style and the fine arts, Kroeber was able to conduct an inquiry into the characteristics, essential nature, features of the past, and future prospects of civilizations.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 147-148.

<sup>10</sup>Kroeber, Style and Civilizations, pp. 1-7.

Agnes Brooks Young examined the change in fashion for two centuries and also reported that fashions follow a rhythmic pattern of cyclical change. In her book, Recurring Cycles of Fashion, 1760-1937, Young maintains that "changes in women's fashions follow fixed patterns, and can even in some measure be reliably predicted."<sup>11</sup> She selected illustrations of typical and representative fashions for each of the 178 years of the study. These costumes, accompanied by statistical evidence, were a visual means of showing annual changes in the central tendencies of fashion. It became evident that minor changes had taken place every year, but major changes had occurred only every three or four decades. Young makes the statement that "fashion change in women's dress is a continuous, slow process of modification."<sup>12</sup> Three general observations were made by Young from her research. She indicates that changes in women's dress have been grouped in well-defined cycles in which modifications of the form and contour of the skirt take place. Her study presents the finding that only three accepted types of skirts are used for street dresses. These are the bell shaped skirt, the skirt with back fullness, and the tubular skirt. The three skirt types are the basis for the cycles which so far have taken place on an almost regular time schedule of approximately one-third century.

Evidence that fashions reveal traces of the economic, historical, or cultural developments of our times does not appear in Young's

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<sup>11</sup>Agnes Brooks Young, Recurring Cycles of Fashion, 1760-1937 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), p. vii.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 206.

conclusions. She writes, "there does not seem to be any clear relationship between the changes in fashion and the unfolding of the events of the times."<sup>13</sup> She also states that, "Fashion in dress is a process of evolution that goes continuously rolling along."<sup>14</sup> Young's theory of independent cyclical change in fashion indicates that fashion has no relationship to socio-historical phenomena.

The cyclical theory which Agnes Young develops is similar to Kroeber's findings of the presence of order or pattern in fashion change. Her view which separates fashion from any influence of the socio-cultural environment is not shared. Kroeber and the conclusions of subsequent studies do not seem to support her conclusions.

The acceptance of the cyclical theory of change in dress has been more favorable. Other writers express similar viewpoints. Russell Lynes writes of men's fashions and their adherence to a trend from gaudy to drab and back to gaudy.<sup>15</sup> Reviewing what has happened to men's clothing, Lynes describes the picturesque and colorful clothing of the time of the French Revolution. This gaudy attire was put aside for the dark suit of the industrial revolution. The dress of nineteenth century men became drab. Women's dress, in contrast, became more gaudy. Men transferred their pride and display to their women. However, when women entered the business world, they began to

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>15</sup>Russell Lynes, "Gaudy to Drab to Gaudy," Harper's Magazine, CCII (April, 1951), pp. 43-48.

dress more simply. Twentieth century males began to dress more flamboyantly to complete the cycle. More the result of observation than scientific study, Russell Lynes writes briefly of the changes in men's fashions.

A significant sociological study of fashion was completed by Bernard Barber and Lyle S. Lobel.<sup>16</sup> They were concerned with the over-generalized term "fashion" which is often treated as meaning socially "irrational" behavior. They drew upon Robert Merton's analysis of patterned social behavior as having latent or unintended as well as manifest consequences for the social systems in which they exist. Barber and Lobel's study was an attempt to show that "fashion" behavior should be analyzed in relation to the American class structure, age-sex roles, and the economic system.

The source materials for Barber and Lobel's study were women's magazines containing "fashion copy" written for the different age groups and different social and economic classes. They examined the social functions of clothes and pointed out the place of fashion in the American class system. The copy writers were found to take the class symbolic function of women's clothes for granted. American society is oriented to social mobility and to the function of clothes for mobility. The economic system makes fashion available at all social levels, but the consumption of fashion goods is socially structured. Fashion choices were also found to conform to the appropriate

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<sup>16</sup>Bernard Barber and Lyle S. Lobel, "'Fashion' in Women's Clothes and the American Social System," Social Forces, XXXI (December, 1952), p. 124.

age-sex symbols of the different age levels, especially the teenager and the college girl.

Barber and Lobel's study concluded that "fashion" has many different meanings and all of its meanings are socially and culturally structured. They also found that "fashion" behavior has latent as well as manifest functions for the many different aspects of the social system.<sup>17</sup>

Estelle DeYoung Barr made a psychological analysis of fashion in which she examined fashion motivation through choice in the selection of women's clothing.<sup>18</sup> Her study was concerned with the complex of numerous and various factors in the selection of clothes. She felt a study of selective activity involved a consideration of the individual as an element in the cultural pattern. Barr proposed that by an analysis of the conformal attitudes of the individual some insight into the behavior of fashion cycles might be gained. It was hoped that an analysis of choices might lead to an understanding of fashion.

The psychological study made by Estelle DeYoung Barr focused upon the "activity of choice" with fashion as just one of the factors affecting it. She used controlled groups and statistically analyzed the desires and attitudes involved in the selection of a garment utilitarian in nature. Her conclusions were that the really fundamental attitudes in the choices of clothes are those associated with the

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>18</sup>Estelle DeYoung Barr, "A Psychological Analysis of Fashion Motivation," Archives of Psychology, XXVI (June, 1934), 7.

desire to conform, the desire for comfort, and the desire for economy. The artistic impulse and self-expression through sex and femininity were also important. These cut across many other differences such as differences in economic status, education, and fashion knowledge. Barr found that most differences in attitudes involved differences in the intensity of the desire to be in fashion.<sup>19</sup>

Some studies have been completed which incorporated both psychological and sociological approaches to an understanding of fashion. Nancy Koplin Jack and Betty Schiffer conceived a fashion study at Pennsylvania State College which involved an intensive analysis of the reciprocal roles of leader and follower in fashion behavior.<sup>20</sup> The authors of this study drew upon Richardson and Kroeber's technique of measuring the aspects of fashion change on photographs. This study used only the dress length. Measurements were taken from magazines from the year 1929 to 1947. Three levels of magazines, representing the top or the designer's level, the middle level, and the average or woman on the street's level of interest in fashion, were sources of measurable photographs.

Jack and Schiffer wished to expand the limitations of the previous study by Richardson and Kroeber. They were interested in the field of fashion control and the possibility of its having a bearing upon other aspects of social control. They searched for the limits

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>20</sup>Nancy Koplin Jack and Betty Schiffer, "The Limits of Fashion Control," American Sociological Review, XIII (December, 1948), 730.

within which any control system in any field must operate, if it is to secure conformity.

Intensive statistical analysis of changes in skirt lengths as they appeared in the magazines at different levels of fashion interest led to the generalization that the follower, the woman on the street, exerts a definable limit to control pressures. It was suggested that there are decided and clear-cut limits within which fashion controls may operate in a given population, in a specified period of time.<sup>21</sup> The imposition of fashion leaders is not as prevalent as commonly assumed. Also the question is raised as to whether it is possible to measure with equal precision the limits to social controls other than fashion controls.

A study employing similar techniques of measuring points of fashion change as represented by photographs in magazines was done for a master's thesis by Geitel Winakor. The purpose of her work was to determine the time lag between high fashion, which denotes new and extreme designs, and the acceptance of fashion by the majority of women. It was found that the peak of the fashion cycle in high fashion usually preceded that of accepted fashion. The time lapse between the two peaks became shorter during the more recent years than in the earlier historic periods.<sup>22</sup>

Economists frequently point to the reflection of our nation's economy upon fashion. Thorsten B. Veblen advanced his theory of the

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 738.

<sup>22</sup>Geitel Winakor, "Time Lag Between High Fashion and Accepted Fashion," Journal of Home Economics, XLVII (May, 1955), 343.



leisure class as an economic explanation for the importance of fashion. His thesis is simply that people who achieve a place above the subsistence level use the surplus to impress other people. Apparel, to Veblen, is one of the means of expressing a surplus. He terms the purchase and display of clothes as conspicuous consumption.<sup>23</sup> Fashion tends to give commercial value to clothing. Fashion makes it possible to display one's wealth as well as one's taste. Veblen felt that women's clothing especially symbolized leisure and the lack of necessity for doing productive work.

Veblen's theory is of interest as an economic analysis of fashion behavior. Other than a recognition of a desire for novelty, Veblen had little to offer as to the willingness of people to change fashions as rapidly as they do.<sup>24</sup>

Analyses by other economists reveal concern regarding the influence of fashion upon the economy. Paul H. Nystrom in his book, Economics of Fashion, expresses the futility of trying to restrain fashion.<sup>25</sup> He recommends that business men and manufacturers recognize fashion as a social force. Vested interests have tried and failed to redirect or to control the use of fashion items in the past. Nystrom urges retailers to work with the tide of fashion trends rather than against them.

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<sup>23</sup>Thorstein B. Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class. (New York: The Modern Library, Inc., 1934), p. xiv.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 167-173.

<sup>25</sup>Paul H. Nystrom, Economics of Fashion (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1928), p. 10.

Economist Paul M. Gregory deplores the power of fashion as he considers it a part of the deliberateness behind the obsolescence of consumer goods. His article, "A Theory of Purposeful Obsolescence," presents his idea that manufacturers introduce new fashions to increase sales volumes. The introduction of fashion makes physically useful apparel become psychologically inferior.<sup>26</sup> Gregory regrets the cost and waste involved in frequent fashion change. Fashion, according to Gregory, adds nothing to our material culture, to industrial progress, or to the improvement of our heritage.<sup>27</sup>

The H. W. Gossard Company, manufacturers of women's foundation garments, conducted a study which indicates the interest of business houses in fashion. Their study was a comparison of changes in fashion with the fluctuations in the nation's economy. The years from 1900 to 1958 were used as a period which included a serious panic, a great depression, and both pre-war and post-war recessions as well as periods of prosperity. It was found that during these years there was a close relationship of skirt lengths and the ups and downs of the business curve.<sup>28</sup> Changes in the waistline accompanied the changes in skirt lengths. Waistlines became tight when skirts lengthened during periods of economic stress. Short skirts were accompanied by loose or non-existent waistlines during good times and prosperity.

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<sup>26</sup>Paul M. Gregory, "A Theory of Purposeful Obsolescence," Southern Economic Journal, XIV (July, 1947), 31.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 41-43.

<sup>28</sup>Detroit Free Press, July 27, 1958, p. 2-C.

This seeming correspondence of changes was presented as a basis for using fashion as a possible economic indicator.

The development of the Gossard theory, which points to the possibility of using fashion for predictive purposes, indicates the interest in this field. The value of this theory is perhaps questionable in view of its consideration of limited factors in the total structure of our society.

Clothing and textile specialists are also engaged in research which is contributing to an understanding of the place of clothing and dress in our civilization and culture. George W. Hartman made the statement that there are few real authorities in this area, but he observed that

In seeking to reorganize clothing research on a broader basis as a sober professional center of investigation, the home economics clothing and textile specialists at the college level may have opened a relatively new area of scholarly inquiry of far more fundamental significance than they themselves have hitherto recognized.<sup>29</sup>

In accord with such interest is the cooperative research program at Michigan State University by the Department of Textiles, Clothing, and Related Arts and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. The social scientists are utilizing their research techniques in an investigation of the social character of clothing behavior.<sup>30</sup> The

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<sup>29</sup>George W. Hartman, "Clothing: Personal Problem and Social Issue," Journal of Home Economics, XLI (June, 1949), 295.

<sup>30</sup>Gregory P. Stone and William H. Form, The Local Community Clothing Market; A Study of the Social and Psychological Contexts of Shopping, Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station Technical Bulletin 262 (East Lansing, Michigan, Michigan State University, November, 1957), p. 3.

work of this joint program including various aspects of clothing inventories, preferences, attitudes, and clothing in occupational and community life has been reported in a series of bulletins.

Different approaches have been made by workers in the various disciplines in an attempt to expand the bounds of research in the area of clothing and fashion. This study is an attempt to contribute to an interpretation of fashion and to an understanding of factors which may relate to the alterations in women's dress. It is hoped that an analysis of change in dress fashions and changes in the socio-cultural environment will lead to a better understanding of fashion and its place in the totality of our civilization.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE BELL SILHOUETTE IN DRESS TO THE SOCIAL SITUATION FROM 1850 TO 1869

This chapter is devoted to the presentation of changes in fashion and changes in the socio-cultural environment which took place during the years from 1850 to 1869. The delineation of these years as the first period to be studied was based upon the duration of the bell-shaped form of the skirt of women's fashionable dress. A long, full skirt had been worn as early as 1830. From that time until the middle of the nineteenth century, the only notable change in dress had been a steady progression toward the development of a wide bell-shaped contour. By 1850 the bell silhouette was well established as the characteristic form of women's dress. This basic form was expanded and elaborated upon until it was finally discarded about the year 1869.

Changes in the socio-cultural situation after the middle of the nineteenth century centered around the application of the many scientific and technological discoveries of the previous decades. The utilization of these new discoveries led to the many industrial and mechanical developments which were to influence almost all aspects of social living.

Nineteenth century America reflected the social and cultural changes which were taking place throughout all Western countries.

The United States had created from its European antecedents a nation politically unique. However, Americans continued to depend upon Europeans for the scientific theories which formed the basis for their mechanical, industrial, and subsequent economic development. Just as the people of the new world adapted the scientific discoveries of England and France, they also adapted the literary and artistic expressions of those countries. Close ties between the United States and Europe fostered similar social and cultural developments on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

#### Fashionable Dress From 1850 to 1869

The dress of the interval between 1850 and 1869 was dominated by a long, full skirt which took the characteristic form of a bell. This was achieved by excessive fullness gathered into a small waistband and supported by numerous petticoats, a crinoline, or hoops. The lady of fashion who dressed in the enormous skirts of the period appeared "fragile, unfit and all but totally immobilized."<sup>1</sup>

Typical dress of the period. The typical dress of 1850 is illustrated in the sketch in Figure 1. The dominant feature, the bell-shaped skirt, is made of three flounces extending to a width of about three-fourths of the wearer's height.<sup>2</sup> The small waistline and the smoothly-fitted bodice indicate the confinement of restrictive

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<sup>1</sup>Agatha Young, The Women and the Crisis (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Millia Davenport, The Book of Costume (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1948), p. 883.



**FIGURE 1**  
**THE DRESS OF 1850**

undergarments. The sleeves, full and wide at the wrists, are made to echo and emphasize the shape of the skirt. Trimming in the form of ruffles and cording is used to accentuate the design of the dress. It is used in moderation. A rather small formal bonnet is tied over soft curls and secured by a soft bow under the chin.<sup>3</sup> Gloves and a decorative parasol are added accessories which complete the costume.

Changes in dress. Changes in dress throughout the period were principally an exaggeration of the characteristic features of the costume of 1850. The upper part of the dress was kept close-fitting and perhaps more restricted by tight corseting. Skirts were made fuller, wider, and much more elaborate. Flounces were increased in number and width. A great number of decorative manipulations such as cording, ruffling, and plaiting was created and applied by the use of the sewing machine. Laces, ribbons, and flowers were lavishly used as trimmings. The sleeves were treated in a similar manner. They were made wider, longer, and much more decorative.

Fabrics used for creating the elaborate dress for fashionable women became increasingly more luxurious. Textures became richer, heavier, and decoratively patterned. Costumes for special occasions were made of extremely light and gauzy materials of which great quantities were used. There was an increasing variety of colors used for dress. The rather conservative hues of the beginning of the era were discarded for white and fragile pastels or garish strong colors.

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<sup>3</sup>Rose Netzog Kerr, 100 Years of Costumes in America (Massachusetts: The Davis Press, Inc., 1951), p. 8.



The point of greatest exaggeration of the bell silhouette was reached between 1860 and 1863. Figure 2 illustrates the costume of 1863 in which the skirt width at the bottom is about equal to the wearer's height. The costume approaches a triangular shape with its broad base at the hem of the skirt. This was also the time at which fashionable dress was most extensively and elaborately decorated. Figure 2 shows the lavish use of trimming to accentuate the width of the skirt and the sleeves.

The year 1863, which marked the peak of the trend toward exaggeration, also marked the turning point in this tendency. After 1863 skirts were gradually reduced in size. The crinoline, which held the skirts in the bell shape, was discarded.<sup>4</sup> Fullness in the skirt was pulled to the back. Fashionable skirts were long, but they were much reduced in width and fullness. By 1869 the bell-shaped contour had given way to a new silhouette.

The source of fashionable dress. American women looked to Europe as a source for fashionable dress during this period. France, as the leading nation of the continent at the mid-point of the nineteenth century, strongly influenced the arts, manners, and refinements of living of the entire Western world. Under the Emperor Louis-Napoleon III, Paris had become the most imposing city in the world. The court and the beautiful Empress, Eugenie de Montijo of Spain, set the

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<sup>4</sup>Lucy Barton, Historic Costume for the Stage (Boston: Walter H. Baker Company, 1935), p. 461.

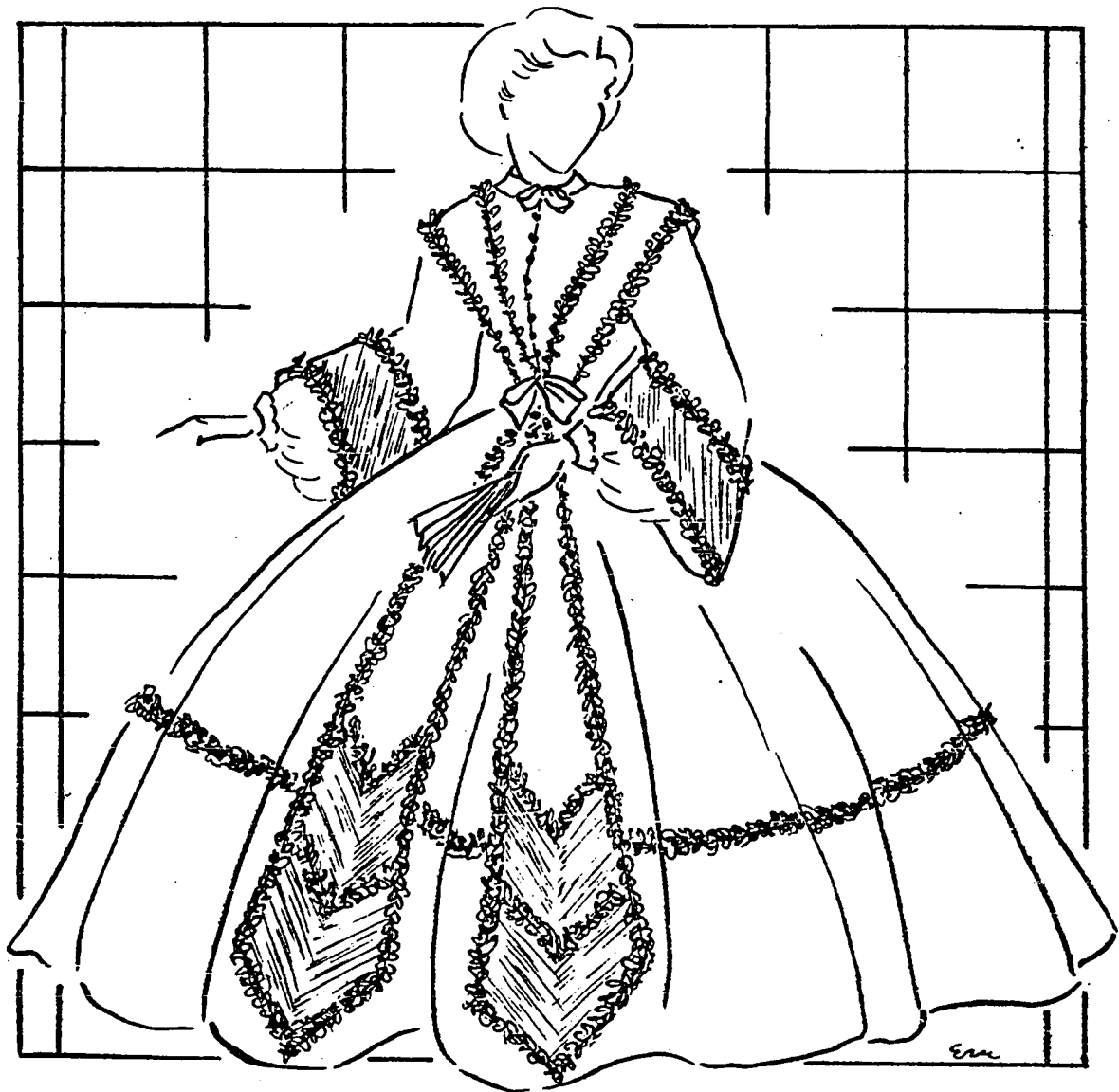


FIGURE 2  
THE DRESS OF 1863

fashions in ladies' dress.<sup>5</sup> The Imperial Court of France was the most magnificent and splendid of the day. Because the French capital gave the tone to fashion, many American women wore gowns which had been brought from Paris or were inspired by those worn by Parisians. American fashions were never as extreme or as extravagant as those of the French. They maintained the expressive qualities of a nation less experienced and less sophisticated in artistry.

The influence of the French court upon American fashions must be recognized. France, under the rule of Emperor Napoleon III from 1852 to 1870, was experiencing a period of social and cultural development which paralleled that of the United States. William F. Ogburn observed that the cultures of America and France were similar in many ways, "particularly when contrasted with the cultures of earlier eras."<sup>6</sup> For this reason French fashions had an especial appeal for Americans. The importation of French fashions into the United States was indicative of an acceptance of an artistic interpretation of a people who were faced by a similar social situation.

Fashion leadership. There were few indications of individual fashion leaders or innovators being able to influence the style of dress which was accepted and worn by the majority of women at this time. Paris was the city of beauty and fashion, and Empress Eugenie was the only individual who might be identified as a fashion leader.

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<sup>5</sup>D. W. Brogan, France Under the Republic (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup>William Fielding Ogburn, Social Change (New York: B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1922), p. 17.

Even Eugenie cannot be credited with creating fashionable dress. She was not responsible for the invention of the crinoline. Wide skirts were being worn when she mounted the throne after her marriage of January, 1853. The Empress had excellent taste in interpreting her feminine and aristocratic role. Her costumes and manner of dress were widely imitated. She chose what pleased her from an assortment of models presented to her. Her selections were followed as long as they conformed to the tendency of the period and were pleasing to the public.<sup>7</sup>

Changes which Empress Eugenie introduced were not followed by the majority of women. She discarded the crinoline as early as 1859. Other French women of fashion continued to wear the crinoline and enlarge it until it reached its maximum size in 1863. Eugenie's introduction of a short walking dress in 1867 was not approved or adopted. Her preference for subtle colors and light dainty fabrics was largely ignored after 1860.<sup>8</sup>

Empress Eugenie's leadership in fashion was relinquished to the new social class created by the industrialization of France. Her refined and subtle costume interpretations failed to express the materialistic concepts of the new rich. The prestige of the Empress was not sufficient for her to maintain fashion leadership when other social

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<sup>7</sup>Oskar Fischel and Max Von Boehn, Modes and Manners of the Nineteenth Century (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1927), IV, pp. 173-174.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., III, pp. 44-46.

groups became more adept at interpreting the social situation of the sixties.

The Relationship of Change in Selected Objective Aspects  
of the Social Situation to Fashionable Dress

This study is based upon the assumption that the choice and selection of design in clothing is a behavioral reaction to the socio-cultural situation in which women of any era find themselves. Also, it is believed that changes in fashion, which are visible expressions of the situation, bear a relationship to the significant alterations in the social systems which comprise the socio-cultural environment. Within the framework of W. I. Thomas' concept of the "situation," the interval from 1850 to 1869 will be examined from the standpoint of a few selected objective aspects of the situation to which women's dress fashions were responsive. Changes in technological developments, economic developments, social stratification, and the family and status of women were considered as the more influential aspects of the social situation which bear a relationship to change in fashionable dress.

Technological developments. One of the most significant aspects of the social situation which contributed to social change during the time from 1850 to 1869 was technological development. This was an era of the utilization of the scientific and technological discoveries which were basic to the spread of industry throughout the Western world. The so-called "industrial revolution" was initiated in England before 1830. It soon spread throughout the European continent and to

America.<sup>9</sup> France, although not the first of the continental nations, began to industrialize around the middle of the nineteenth century. America responded more quickly. The United States had been an agrarian-dominated country during the first part of the century, but it was soon transformed more than any other country by the technological developments of the time.

Technological developments affected almost all aspects of Western society. The development of the new source of power - steam, and the use of new materials - iron and steel, contributed greatly to the rapid growth of industry.

Methods of transportation and communications were expanded and improved. The influence of the railroads and the telegraph was felt in both Europe and America. The United States was able to push frontiers in all directions and yet maintain a unity which would not have been possible without the new developments.

The production of printed materials greatly increased through new technological devices. Printing presses for newspapers and magazines added a greater quantity of current information than had been possible through books.

The resulting increase of contacts through travel and communication greatly stimulated interest in women's dress fashions. It was not only possible to view new fashions, but also to obtain fashion information more rapidly than ever before. Popular publications such

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<sup>9</sup>Carlton J. H. Hayes, A Political and Cultural History of Modern Europe (shorter revised ed.; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1939), II, 3-7.

as Godey's Lady's Book, Graham's Magazine, Arthur's Lady's Book, and Peterson's Magazine contained fashion illustrations<sup>10</sup> and dress designs which were eagerly copied by seamstresses and dressmakers.

The textile and clothing industries were among the first to be affected by the new technology. Machines made possible the production of greater quantities of fabrics in beautiful and varied textures. Power-driven machinery began to compete with handwork in the French textile industry by 1850.<sup>11</sup> Empress Eugenie wore and popularized heavy and costly fabrics such as the brocades, lampas, moires, taffetas, damasks, and reps which were manufactured by the silk weavers at Lyons. Light diaphanous materials, organdy, tulle, tarlatan, and gauze, were created by other weavers equally skilled.<sup>12</sup> The looms of England and America also contributed their products to the increasing variety and quantities of textiles available to the women of the day.

The production of great quantities of fabric by mechanical means made it physically and economically possible for women to increase the size of their full, gathered skirts.<sup>13</sup> The availability of sufficient material permitted the increase in the width and fullness of the skirt

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<sup>10</sup>Paul McPharlin, Life and Fashion in America (New York: Hastings House, Publishers, Inc., 1946), p. 38.

<sup>11</sup>Hayes, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>12</sup>Oskar Fischel and Max Von Boehn, Modes and Manners of the Nineteenth Century (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1927), III, 67-69.

<sup>13</sup>Charles Seignobos, The Evolution of the French People (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1938), p. 337.

which characterized the fashions of the fifties and sixties. The plentiful supply of fabrics induced the use of yards and yards of material for fullness, flounces, ruffles, and decorative details.

The invention of the sewing machine greatly influenced the making and design of clothing. An American, Elias Howe, successfully adapted previous inventions by the English and the French to produce the first workable model. The marketing of his automatic, highly efficient machine brought one of the first labor-saving devices into the home. Factories also used Howe's sewing machine to make cheaper and faster production of clothing and shoes possible.<sup>14</sup> The development of factory-made clothing was greatly stimulated by the demands of the Civil War in the United States. It was during this era that the ready-to-wear industry was born. However, it was not to become a thriving industry until later in the century.

The chief use of the sewing machine during this interval from 1850 to 1869 was for the creation of decorative trimming. Dresses of better quality continued to be made at home by hand or by skilled dressmakers. The sewing machine was an ingenious device which made possible the manipulation of fabric and intricate stitchery. It was in this capacity that the sewing machine was used for fashionable dress. The amount of trimming greatly increased and dresses became more complicated and elaborate in design. Only after the novelty of the new mechanical device had worn off did the sewing

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<sup>14</sup>Merle Curti, Richard H. Shryock, Thomas C. Cochran, and Fred Harvey Harrington, An American History (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), II, 5-6.



machine become a useful and practical aid to the homemaker.<sup>15</sup>

The technological developments of this period brought expansion and increase to the Western countries. The new machines and new forms of power created an abundance of new materials to be used for achievement and enjoyment. There were such quantities of materials and such fostering of invention during this era that fashions in dress became reflective of the technological achievements of the day.

Economic developments. Economic developments during the interval between 1850 and 1869 were significant factors influencing change in Western society. The fifties and sixties were economically prosperous times on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>16</sup> The Western world was embarking upon an era of unprecedented prosperity.

France, especially, was a beneficiary of the proceeds of nineteenth century industrial development. It was possible to gain wealth very quickly in France. Fortunes which soon rivalled the holdings of the aristocracy were achieved by the manufacturing bourgeoisie. Gamblers, profiteers, and demimondes acquired wealth as never before. These newly rich became prominent in French society. They made the court of Napoleon III and his beautiful Empress, Eugenie, the most spectacular of the Western nations. Paris was the materialistic showplace of the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Agnes Brooks Young, Recurring Cycles of Fashion (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1937), p. 95.

<sup>16</sup>Albert Guerard, France (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1959), p. 311.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

The United States also entered into a period of economic prosperity after 1850. The middle of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of a period of transition from a simple agrarian economy to a complex industrial structure.<sup>18</sup> A rich and fertile agricultural region, a substantial manufacturing organization, an expanding transportation system, and an increasing supply of labor were components of nation-wide prosperity in the fifties.<sup>19</sup>

The United States, however, was responding to the expanding industrial developments with an economy which was regionally divided. The Northern part of the nation was rapidly creating factories and manufacturing centers which were to become urban foci of wealth. The South, predominantly rural and agricultural, was building its wealth upon large property holdings. While the nation was agrarian in its economy, the large planters with thousands of acres of land and many slave laborers were the wealthy aristocrats of the country. When their position was challenged by the industrial leaders of the North, the basic economic differences were brought into conflict.

The increased emphasis upon industrialization brought about greater dependence upon business and a greater degree of fluctuation in the business cycles.<sup>20</sup> The prosperity of spreading industrialism in the fifties was interrupted by the panic of 1857. The relatively short period of depression following that critical year was terminated

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<sup>18</sup>Curti, et al, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>19</sup>Robert M. MacIver and Charles H. Page, Society (New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1949), p. 454.

<sup>20</sup>Curti, et. al, op. cit., p. 41.

by the war-time boom precipitated by the War Between the States. The demands of the war fostered prosperity in the industrial, commercial, and manufacturing areas of the United States. The agricultural South did not share in the war boom. The Southern states lost their wealth as well as the war.

The prosperity of the times was evident in the fashionable dress of the women of the mid-nineteenth century. The French court was a scene of lavishness and display in dress which would have been possible only during an era of expanding wealth. The quantities of rich and costly materials used for dress were indicative of a bountiful supply of money and a willingness to use it for display.

In the United States the women of the South were the first possessors of wealth and social position. The great plantations afforded the means for Southern women to indulge their taste for luxurious and beautiful clothes.

The locale of the economically prosperous changed during the 1860's. The War Between the States stimulated the industrial development of the Northern region of the country. The growing fortunes of the industrial areas permitted an increased emphasis upon costly clothing. Women of the urban centers soon acquired fashionable dress in keeping with newly acquired wealth.

Social stratification. Social stratification was an aspect of Western society which became increasingly important with the spread of industrialism and the resulting economic development.<sup>21</sup> The social

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<sup>21</sup>Joseph A. Kahl, The American Class Structure (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1957), p. 119.

class structure, which had been rigidly fixed for centuries, began to fluctuate about the middle of the nineteenth century. The elite and favored position in the social structure had been occupied by the aristocratic and militaristic groups. After 1850 they began to be supplanted by a new group whose economic power and wealth brought them into competition. The financial, merchandising, and manufacturing classes became rich enough to mingle with the landowning classes.<sup>22</sup> The upper classes became those who had acquired wealth and ownership of power property rather than membership in a noble family.

The breakdown in the class structure and the consciousness of a new social classification was apparent enough to be recognized. Karl Marx was one of the first to perceive the process of dissolution and regrouping which characterized social stratification after 1850. Marx was also the first to develop a theory of class differences based upon the economic developments of a fast industrializing society.<sup>23</sup>

The class structure of the United States, following the democratic ideology of the times, was relatively fluid. Constant opening of Western lands prevented the establishment of a landed aristocracy<sup>24</sup> except in the Southern portion of the country. Only in the South did the acquisition of land form the basis for a designation of an upper class.<sup>25</sup> The possession of land continued as a basis for position in the

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<sup>22</sup>H. G. Wells, An Outline of History (Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Company, 1949), pp. 968-969.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 977.

<sup>24</sup>Kahl, op. cit., p. 103.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

South although the wealth which supported the aristocracy was lost with the loss of the War Between the States.

The industrialized regions, especially after the war of 1861-1865, were characterized by a new emphasis upon the acquisition of money and power property. The nation's shift from wealth and position founded upon agricultural holdings to that acquired through industry and manufacturing created a new upper class in the United States. The North and Northeastern part of the country became the locale of the prestige group of the nation after the Civil War.

Industrialization after the war fostered a larger middle class in the United States. The recovery period was dominated by the so-called "captain of industry." According to C. Wright Mills, "He was our first national image of the middle-class man as a businessman."<sup>26</sup> Employees in trade, transportation, and manufacturing began to increase rapidly during this period. Emphasis upon mass production and distribution in the United States brought a larger proportion of people into a broadening middle class stratum. The middle class in industrialized areas included a wide range of responsibility and income. This tendency to include a great variety of workers in the middle class increased in significance as the century progressed.<sup>27</sup>

Changes in social stratification coincided with changes in fashion leadership. Empress Eugenie, whose taste fostered beautiful, exquisite, and daintily feminine costumes, was looked upon as arbiter

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<sup>26</sup>C. Wright Mills, White Collar (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 5.

<sup>27</sup>Curti, et. al, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

of fashion during the early days of the Second Empire. The Southern women of the United States, aristocrats in their own land, were the fashion leaders in America. Southerners copied and wore the Parisian gowns created for the French court. In Washington, D.C., the social center of the nation at mid-nineteenth century, more Southern women displayed fashionable dress than any other regional group.<sup>28</sup> The luxurious, elaborate, and decorative gowns of Paris suited the gracious manner of plantation living indulged in by the wealthy agriculturists of the South. Changes in the social class system, which were becoming more apparent after 1860, brought to the fore a new group of fashion leaders and standards.

Fashion in dress after 1860 reflected the presence of a new prestige class in the social structure. The bourgeoisie, the possessors of new wealth, and the courtesans of Paris began to dominate the social life of the fashion center. The taste of these groups brought an end to the daintiness and femininity of the Empress' court dress. A loudness of dress and manners spread throughout France.<sup>29</sup> Gaudy trimmings, heavy fabrics, and harsh, garish colors were first noticeable in Paris. The desire to be noticed and attract attention seemed to supersede a former emphasis upon aesthetic appeal. Americans never adopted the European morals nor the extremes of fashion brought about

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<sup>28</sup>John Rouse Larus, Woman (Philadelphia: George Barrie & Sons, 1908), X, 320.

<sup>29</sup>Fischel and Von Boehm, op. cit., p. 96.

by the new social grouping, but they did reflect the influence of a change of taste in dress.<sup>30</sup>

The emphasis upon wealth as the basis for social classification after the Civil War led to a shift in fashion leadership in the United States. The rise of new fortunes in the Northern portion of the nation created a greater concern for fashion among Northern women. Increased wealth also promoted greater class consciousness. However, the residents of urban manufacturing centers were not accustomed to the extreme luxury and graciousness of living of the upper class of the South. After the war the extravagant gowns of the fifties were modified. The bell-shaped skirt was reduced in size, and excessive decorations were eliminated. The disappearance of the crinoline in 1869 marked the end of the Southern woman's dominance of fashion.

The influence of fashion in dress permeated all social levels during this period after the middle of the nineteenth century. There was little difference in the basic cut and design of dress worn by the different classes at this time. The full skirted dress with its wide expanse of material held out by the crinoline was worn by all classes. The amount of decoration and the quality of the material used for a dress varied, but the crinoline was indispensable. The servants performing their tasks about the house wore dresses similar to those of the ladies of the leisured class.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Larus, op. cit., pp. 308-309.

<sup>31</sup>Fischel and Von Boehn, op. cit., p. 58.

There were distinguishing details in dress which were used to identify membership in the upper classes. There was a tendency for some groups to add elegant touches of lace and embroidery to their costumes. Fragile white petticoats and luxurious handkerchiefs also served as marks of class membership. Such items could not be so easily imitated by the less leisured or the less wealthy at that time.<sup>32</sup>

Changes in social stratification brought about by industrialization and economic developments were clearly reflected in the fashions and fashion leadership of the interval from 1850 to 1869. The shift in prestige and wealth resulted in new upper classes with a taste quite different from that of the aristocrats of the French court and the Southern plantations.

The family and status of women. The family and status of women were extremely important aspects of the socio-cultural environment for women of the mid-nineteenth century. The ideals of home and family were supreme.<sup>33</sup> Woman's place was in the home, and care of the family superseded all else. The homemaker's duties were extensive, since each family was relatively self-sufficient. Most physical, educational, and recreational needs of the members of the family were provided for within the home. Women were completely dominated by their husbands and the demands of their families.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>33</sup>Eric John Dingwall, The American Woman (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1957), p. 73.



The family of the nineteenth century embodied the romanticism which accompanied the industrial revolution. Marriage itself was based upon the selection of a partner on a romantic and voluntary basis. There was great emphasis upon happiness.<sup>34</sup> Women were especially interested in the decoration of their homes. They indulged in the "home arts" to make their surroundings pleasant and attractive. They painted and embroidered a multitude of items to add beauty and sentimentality to their lives.<sup>35</sup>

The dress of the mid-nineteenth century expressed the striving for beauty and romance with which the extremely feminine woman of the times surrounded herself. The cumbersome skirts and relative immobility demanded by her costume signified her willingness to remain within her home. The aura of helplessness which signified her dependency upon the masculine members of society was eloquently expressed by the hampering sweep of wide skirts. Delicate fabrics, lovely pastel colors, and beautiful trimmings enhanced the decorativeness of the women who graced the homes of the day.

Soon after 1850 the family began to feel the impact of the industrialization of the nation. The transformation of the production of textiles from household manufacture to factory production initiated the change in family life which was to alter not only the family, but also the status of women. Production outside the home changed the self-sufficient family into a group of individual workers. The home became

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<sup>34</sup>Ray E. Baber, Marriage and the Family (2nd. ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1953), p. 5.

<sup>35</sup>Hayes, op. cit., pp. 115-116.

a consumption unit. Families began to move into urban areas. Families became smaller in size. More family members, including some women, began to work outside the home. The family of the nineteenth century changed from a compact unit of Gemeinschaft qualities to the Gesellschaft type fostered by the industrial economy.

The mid-point of the nineteenth century witnessed the beginning of a change in the status of women. The Women's Rights Convention met in 1848 to protest the position of women at that time. A "declaration of sentiments" was drawn up to protest unequal property rights, disfranchisement, inequality of divorce laws, occupational limitations, and the lack of educational opportunities for women.<sup>36</sup> This was the beginning of the change of feeling toward the domination of women by males. It was a registration of dissatisfaction of women with their social and legal status.

The spirit behind the Women's Rights Convention was made manifest again in 1864 with the publication of Eliza W. Farnham's Woman and Her Era. This was an attempt to show that women were organically superior to men and had greater capacities than men. The derived cry "Women's Rights" was brought forth from the arguments of the book, but it received little attention. Most women seemed content with their place in the home in spite of these pioneer efforts to improve their situation.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Baber, op. cit., p. 333.

<sup>37</sup>Larus, op. cit., pp. 354-356.

Women did start to work outside the home in the late sixties. The losses suffered by the war in the United States provided a need for women to work. The opportunities for women increased with progress in industrialization. In France women were first hired as telegraph operators in 1866.<sup>38</sup> Empress Eugenie first permitted women to be employed in public service. In America, Southern women were first working as governesses and teachers. Northern women entered the business world.<sup>39</sup> The era of the working woman had its beginning before 1869. The major impact of this trend for women to work outside the home was not felt until later in the century.

The movement toward women's rights and equality with men received very little active support in the early years of its inception. However, there was an expression of the feeling behind the movement by a few women who attempted to reform women's dress. Mrs. Amelia Bloomer, an American, presented her reform costume in London in 1851. The costume consisted of long baggy trousers covered by short skirts. These "Bloomers" as they came to be called, were a first attempt to incorporate masculine trousers into women's dress. Mrs. Bloomer's costume created quite a stir, but it was not accepted and worn by the women of the time.<sup>40</sup> The majority of women had nothing to do with either "Women's Rights" or the reform dress suggestive of masculine clothing.

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<sup>38</sup>Fischel and Von Boehn, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>39</sup>Larus, op. cit., pp. 366-368.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 354-355.

This period from 1850 to 1869 marked the beginnings of change for the family and the status of women. Most women were unaffected and unaware of such alterations in the social structure. The majority of women seemed quite content to be in their homes. They were rulers of their households; they were loved and respected. Women did not question the dominance of males. They were the epitome of femininity and expressed this quality in their beautiful costumes.

The Relationship of Change in Selected Subjective  
Aspects of the Social Situation to  
Fashionable Dress

The situational concept of W. I. Thomas includes a consideration of the subjective aspects which exist only for the actor in a specified social situation. Thomas' recognition of the "definition of the situation," the way in which individuals perceive the situation and the derived meaning to the individual, is an extremely important factor in the behavioral reaction to any situation.<sup>41</sup> This study utilizes the view that the individual is permitted definitions of the situation in which he finds himself and that these interpretations are subject to variation. Considering fashionable dress as visible interpretation of contemporary "definitions of the situation," the time interval from 1850 to 1869 will be examined to determine the relationship between changes in dress and changes in some of the subjective aspects of the

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<sup>41</sup>Edmund H. Volkart, ed., Social Behavior and Personality: Contributions of W. I. Thomas to Theory and Social Research. (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1951), pp. 4-11.

social situation.

The period from 1850 to 1869 was dominated by romanticism and sentimentality, prudery, femininity and dependency, materialism, and consciousness of social class. Changes in these subjective aspects of the situation coincided with changes in dress. Fashions in dress tended to reflect the "definition of the situation" of the majority of women within a specified situation.

Romanticism and sentimentality. Romanticism and sentimentality permeated almost every aspect of the rather restricted lives of women in the nineteenth century.<sup>42</sup> Most women were permitted only the activities of their homes and families; so the homemakers of the day sought to make the most of their surroundings. They searched for beauty and attempted to incorporate it into everything. The homes of the period were so strongly dominated by feminine taste and were so romantic and fanciful that they suggested a dream world.<sup>43</sup>

The increasing absorption of men in commercial and industrial activity tended to isolate women, especially married women.<sup>44</sup> The separation of the sexes was noticeable even in social life. Left to herself in her home, the homemaker turned to various forms of romantic escapism. The reading and writing of sentimental novels and poetry, participation in drama, music, and the arts, and the arrangement of

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<sup>42</sup>Hayes, op. cit., pp. 106-107.

<sup>43</sup>A. Young, The Women and the Crisis, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>44</sup>Dingwall, op. cit., p. 73.

beautiful furnishings constituted a refuge from the drabness of life in an industrialized world.

The attitudes of romanticism and sentimentality extended throughout the fifties and early sixties with little change. The war years necessitated a more realistic viewpoint. But even the wars were looked upon as romantic adventures by the ladies who gaily sent their men off to the fighting.

The fashions of this period from 1850 to 1869 were beautifully expressive of the romantic and sentimental feeling which dominated the era. The wide sweeping skirts with their flounces and ruffles created a bell-like form which was pleasing to the eye. Women, housed in rather restrictive garments, managed to seem feminine, beautiful, and creatures of phantasy. All manner of trimming and decorations was employed to enhance the attractiveness and prettiness of the wearers of the crinoline. This was a time when fabrics were fragile and dainty, and colors were soft and light. The costumes of the day, too, were a means by which women could escape the harsh realities of their environment.

The tendency to define the situation in terms of romanticism and sentimentality coincided with the use of costumes based upon the bell silhouette. The diminishing size of skirts and a moderation in the use of decoration marked a shift from a preoccupation with a world of phantasy to a more vital role in a realistic, post-war recovery period. Following the war, women were less engrossed in the romanticism and sentimentality which had been so dominant at the mid-point of the nineteenth century.

Prudery. Extreme modesty and prudery controlled the lives of American women of the period from 1850 to 1869. The nineteenth century woman was faced with a situation paradoxically moral and immoral. From England came the attitudes of seriousness, godliness, and stiffness associated with Queen Victoria.<sup>45</sup> The French contributed the vulgar, ostentatious, and corrupt qualities which accompanied the gaiety of a society of opportunists, gamblers, profiteers, and the demimonde. Even the court included a bohemian group whose loose manners and morals were regarded disapprovingly by the clerical aristocracy and the solid bourgeoisie.<sup>46</sup> Americans, exposed to both influences, developed standards of their own. These were more in harmony with the Puritanism of the Founding Fathers than with either of the European influences of the nineteenth century.

The American fashions of the mid-nineteenth century were dominated by prudery characteristic of a Puritanical attitude toward the female sex. They also reflected the European interpretations of fashionable dress. High necklines and long sleeves covered up the upper half of the body. The bell-shaped skirt disguised the lower half of the figure entirely. The basic contour and design of the crinoline successfully achieved the chaste qualities approved by the English Queen, Victoria. However, the fitted bodices which outlined the contours of the bust were a reflection of the French taste. The feminine figure was covered, but it was not entirely concealed. American women

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<sup>45</sup>Barton, op. cit., pp. 422-423.

<sup>46</sup>Guerard, op. cit., p. 311.

modified the French designs to meet their own conservatism, but they did not ignore the French interpretation of fashionable dress.

This characteristic attitude toward covering the feminine body almost entirely and disguising at least some of its contours was maintained throughout this interval under consideration. The basis for American prudery preceded the middle of the nineteenth century. There was little change until a later era. The bell silhouette was followed by a fashionable form which was similar in its distortion and concealment qualities. Women maintained their definition of the situation in terms of modesty and discreetness in dress throughout the nineteenth century.

Femininity and dependence. The women of this period were extremely feminine and dependent upon the masculine members of society. They were economically and legally dominated by men. Women had few rights but many privileges. Most women were content with their role. They enjoyed their femininity and profited from their dependency.

The costume of 1850 expressed the definition of women as feminine and dependent members of a male-dominant society. Fashionable women at that time were principally decorative assets in the households of successful men in both the industrialized regions of the North and the plantations of the South. A doll-like quality was created by widely extended skirts. Tight corseting rendered women unable to exert themselves in any strenuous activity. Their hands were hampered by long flowing sleeves which prevented any useful activity. Extensive use of trimming created a costume which was decorative but made it impractical for useful activity.



The Southern women of the United States, especially, interpreted this role of femininity and dependence in their dress. The women of the South wore dresses with wider skirts and more decorative trimming than those of any other region of the country. The Southern woman had slaves to care for her household, and carriages to take her wherever she wished to go.<sup>47</sup> Her dress signified her lack of need to be either useful or practical. The dresses worn by Southern women resembled closely the styles worn by Empress Eugenie and her ladies. The French court, the model for the fashions of the fifties, was dominated by one of the most feminine as well as one of the most beautiful women of the Western world.

This role of helpless femininity reached its peak at about the same time the bell-silhouette reached its widest extension. Just before the Civil War women were expected to do very little either within or outside of their own households. In the early sixties the women of the South were forced to assume the burden of running the plantations and their homes while the men were away. The war created more demands upon the women of the North. The decrease in the width of fashionable skirts coincided with women's assumption of more responsibility and a greater willingness to work. A gradual trend toward relative simplicity and moderation in cut and decoration indicated a turning away from the extreme femininity of the pre-war era.

The War Between the States was important in fostering this change in attitude regarding the femininity and dependency of women.

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<sup>47</sup>Larus, op. cit., p. 322.

Agatha Young detected in the fiction of the fifties that women of this era were "restive, resentful of men, aware of their own vitality, and dissatisfied by the limitations which their way of life put on their powers."<sup>48</sup> The Civil War presented an opportunity for women to prove their capabilities. Some were quick to take advantage of a means for altering the definition of the situation in which they had been placed.

The change in attitude toward femininity and dependency was not shared by all women. There was only a beginning of a trend which influenced the interpretation of the situation slightly.

The movement toward the establishment of the equality of women was even less apparent to the women of the time. This was a trend which was contrary to the interpretation of women's role held by the majority of women. The movement for women's rights had little significance to most women, since they were unaware of its existence. Most women maintained their femininity and dependency.

The rejection of a costume which was created as an expression of women's rights and equality with men illustrates the difficulty of introducing fashions which are not in harmony with the definition of the situation held by the majority of women. The first attempt to create a fashion which suggested the use of a masculine characteristic was not successful because women were still defining their situation in terms of femininity and dependency upon men. The trouser-like

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<sup>48</sup>A. Young, Women in the Crisis, op. cit., p. 12.

garment introduced by Mrs. Amelia Bloomer went beyond the framework of expectancy of change in women's fashion at that time.<sup>49</sup> Mrs. Bloomer was an innovator whose creation was concurrent with the trend of change in attitude toward women's rights. Her garment reflected an interpretation of her own views rather than those of the majority of women.

There was a lack of interest in Mrs. Bloomer's new fashion, since most women were not interested in a situation of equality with men. They were not defining the situation of the times in terms of women's rights. The rejection of the garment indicated the satisfaction women felt in their femininity and dependency. Fashions became even more expressive of the femininity of women in a male-dominant society.

Materialism. A new emphasis upon materialism accompanied the industrialization of the Western world. The fifties and sixties were characterized by increased material wealth and acquired power. It was a time when riches were obtained quickly. It was also a time when the recipients of good fortune wished to display their gains. Paris, with its facilities for materialistic expression, became the pleasure and fashion center for Western society.<sup>50</sup>

The Second Empire of France was not totally submerged in the materialism of display by the quickly rich. Napoleon III was aware

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<sup>49</sup>H. G. Barnett, Innovation (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1953), p. 318.

<sup>50</sup>Guerard, op. cit., p. 311.

of and shared the views expressed earlier by Saint-Simon. Both felt the duty of the government was to promote the material and moral welfare of the poorer classes. It was during this era that Auguste Comte developed his positive philosophy and humanitarianism. Such expressions of thought stimulated a more equalitarian distribution of the wealth France was creating. The Emperor made it possible to combine state capitalism with collective private enterprise to promote a better way of living for everyone. New public buildings, promenades, and public health programs were created during the rule of Napoleon III.<sup>51</sup> The materialism of this era was not completely frivolous.

Fashionable dress was one of the favorite means of display and an expression of wealth. The women of France and of the United States wore costumes which proclaimed the abilities of their households to permit the consumption of yards and yards of costly materials in wide-skirted dresses. Nowhere in America did the women dress in a more lavishly decorated and highly impractical manner than in the South. The crinoline and the bell-shaped silhouette were associated with the luxurious manner of living on the Southern plantations. The materialistic success of the South during the fifties and of the industrialized North in the following decade was proclaimed by the women in their beautiful Parisian gowns. The values associated with material wealth and its acquisition were visibly expressed by the fashions of the period. Only an emphasis upon wealth and display would permit the

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., pp. 312-313.

use of such elaborate decoration and trimmings which characterized the costumes of the interval between 1850 and 1869.

Consciousness of social class. The nineteenth century was an era during which developed a new consciousness of social class. The spread of industrialization fostered the breakdown of the traditional class structure. The acquisition of wealth permitted a realignment of social classes. The shift in the social class structure created new prestige classes. The old world groups most widely imitated in the fifties were the traditionally dominant nobility and the militaristic groups. The aristocrats of the United States were the large plantation owners of the rural South. These upper class groups lost their position and their prestige. A new attitude toward the social class structure permitted a shift in the prestige groups of society.

The fashion behavior of women during the interval between 1850 and 1869 reflected their perception of a change in the social class structure. The shift in the upper classes from the aristocracy to the acquirers of wealth resulted in a change in prestige and fashion leadership. The class within which styles were developed and hence imitated became attainable to a new group. Fashionable women recognized this shift and transferred their allegiance to the group which had acquired upper class status and prestige.

The prestige factor, according to Barnett's concept of innovation, is decisive in the acceptance or rejection of new ideas.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Barnett, op. cit., p. 313.

The retention of fashion leadership in the upper class regardless of a shift in the class structure is a reflection of the importance of the prestige factor. The ladies of the French court and the plantations of the South lost their leadership in the fashion world when they lost their position in the upper strata of society. Fashion leadership remained with the upper class group in the social structure, but there was a change in the content of the social group. The newly rich on both sides of the Atlantic became the prestige group toward the end of the 1860's.

The bell-shaped contour in fashionable dress was an expression of the French court and the aristocracy of the Southern part of the United States. It reached its most extravagant width and its peak of exaggeration at the height of the prestige of these groups. The demise of the crinoline, the basis of the bell silhouette, coincided with the realignment of classes within the social structure. The shift in the prestige groups corresponded with the change to a new silhouette.

The consciousness of social class and the realignment of classes during this period following the middle of the nineteenth century coincided with a greater use of fashionable dress to indicate class status. The imitation of a prestige group became more important with an increased possibility of achieving a place in a more desirable strata of society.

The situation of the period from 1850 to 1869 was aptly defined by the women of the times and reflected in their choice of fashionable dress. The replacement of the bell silhouette coincided with

alterations in the attitudes basic to the situation. New "definitions of the situation" prompted the development of a new basic contour for the fashions of the day.

The Relationship of Crises in the Social  
Situation to Fashionable Dress

The situational concept of W. I. Thomas includes a consideration of the presence of new stimuli as important in any analysis of human behavior. He designated the intrusion of stimuli of a disruptive nature as a "crisis."<sup>53</sup> Thomas regarded such "crises" as very significant in their effect upon the rate and direction of social change. Crises in a historical treatment of a span of time are principally of a political or economic nature. The effects of such disruptions upon the socio-cultural situation are usually far-reaching.

Crises in France. The crises of France were significant stimuli to fashion and fashion change in that country and in the United States. American fashions in dress, inspired by the French, were influenced by events and resulting social change in that country as well as by crises in the United States.

France had attained a position as a dominant European nation by the middle of the nineteenth century. The turbulence of the first half of the century had been climaxed by a revolution which had led to the establishment of the Second Republic. Prince Louis-Napoleon

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<sup>53</sup>Volkart, op. cit., p. 13.

assumed the presidency, but the Republic failed to survive. The Second Empire, also the result of a revolution, was proclaimed in 1852. These upheavals in the French government marked a turning point in the political and economic affairs of France.

The Second Empire in France under Emperor Louis-Napoleon was relatively free from disturbance. It was a period of domestic peace and economic prosperity under an almost authoritarian regime.<sup>54</sup> Several military expeditions were carried on abroad without serious consequences to the country. The War with Mexico was the most extensive campaign. This terminated with the withdrawal of the French army and the execution of the Emperor, Maximilian, in 1867.

The misfortunes of the Empire began in the early sixties. The Emperor's position was jeopardized by his own illness and physical decay coupled with the failure of his foreign policies abroad. By 1867 there was a marked change in the political machinery of the French government. Renewed activity of the political parties prompted a change in the constitution in the Elections of 1869. A weakening of the Empire and the defeat of the French army by the Prussians led to the establishment of the Republic in 1870.<sup>55</sup>

The rule of Louis-Napoleon III and the Second Empire in France corresponds closely to the duration of the bell silhouette in dress. By the middle of the nineteenth century the bell-shaped form was

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<sup>54</sup>Guerard, *op. cit.*, pp. 308-309.

<sup>55</sup>Arthur Tilley, *Modern France* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1922), pp. 165-166.



clearly defined. The increase in width of skirts and decorative trimming corresponded with the favorable years of the Second Empire. The skirts were made their widest and decorations most lavishly used in the early 1860's. This was about the time of France's involvement in the War with Mexico. The year 1863, which may be designated the point of change in the bell silhouette, was also the beginning of the misfortunes of the Empire. The Emperor's position was increasingly weakened by his own illness and the failure of his foreign policies. The bell silhouette began to diminish in size and elaborateness at the same time.

The termination of the bell silhouette in women's dress coincided with a period of crisis in the French government. From 1866 to 1869 the political parties of France successfully undermined the strength of the Empire. It was during this time that the use of the crinoline tapered off. The year 1869 may be considered the last during which the bell silhouette was fashionable.<sup>56</sup> By 1870 a new basic form dominated women's dress. It was in the same year that the Second Empire had been replaced by the new Republic.

Crises in the United States. The crises in the United States also showed a relationship to fashions in women's dress. Although the events introducing new stimuli into the lives of Americans were different from those changing French politics, there may be shown a correspondence of change in fashion with change brought about by crises.

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<sup>56</sup>Barton, op. cit., p. 461.

The United States was affected principally by financial crises and the tragic War Between the States. The increasing prosperity of the middle nineteenth century was interrupted by the financial panic of 1857 and the depression which followed.<sup>57</sup> However, the crisis of greatest significance for the nation followed soon after. The regional differences of the North and the South precipitated the Civil War which disrupted the country from its beginning in 1861 until the cessation of fighting in 1865. Both regions of the country were tremendously affected by this major crisis. The stimulus to industrialization created a financial boom in 1863 which was largely localized in the Northern part of the nation. The South, its homes and goods destroyed, faced financial ruin as the war dragged on.

The influence of French fashions were strong in the United States, but changes in women's dress fashions corresponded with crises in the younger nation. The peak of exaggeration of the bell silhouette and the point of change in 1863 coincided with the war between the Northern and Southern portions of the country. The year 1863 may be considered a financially prosperous year for the industrialized North, but it was a year in which the South began to realize the hopelessness of its cause. The bell silhouette began to diminish in size after 1863. This trend continued throughout the remainder of the war.

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<sup>57</sup>Curti, et al., op. cit., pp. 41-42.

The last five years of the 1860's were years of transition for the bell silhouette and a period of recovery for the nation. Both the North and the South were recovering from their losses. Industry and agriculture had been greatly stimulated by the Civil War. By 1869 the United States was on the brink of a new era of commercial and agricultural development.<sup>58</sup> A change in the dress silhouette accompanied these new trends. The crinoline disappeared in 1869 in spite of the prediction of Godey's Lady's Book that it would continue to be worn.<sup>59</sup> The fashion writers of the time failed to consider the influence of new stimuli upon women's dress. New economic and industrial developments were accompanied by a new silhouette in women's dress fashions.

The correspondence of changes in women's dress fashions with crisis events during the interval between 1850 and 1869 is an indication of the influence of new stimuli upon dress. Points of change and alterations in dress design coincided with crises in both France and the United States.

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<sup>58</sup>Arthur S. Link, American Epoch (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), p. 8.

<sup>59</sup>Barton, loc. cit.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE BUSTLE SILHOUETTE IN DRESS TO THE SOCIAL SITUATION FROM 1870 TO 1889

The second time interval in this study of fashion and social change was designated as beginning in 1870. This was a year of change in the basic contour of fashionable dress. The period from 1870 to 1889 appeared superficially to be a continuation of the industrial and economic developments of the previous era. However, the change to a new silhouette in dress and significant alterations in the socio-cultural environment were indications that this was a period fundamentally different from the era of the bell silhouette and the crinoline.

#### Fashionable Dress From 1870 to 1889

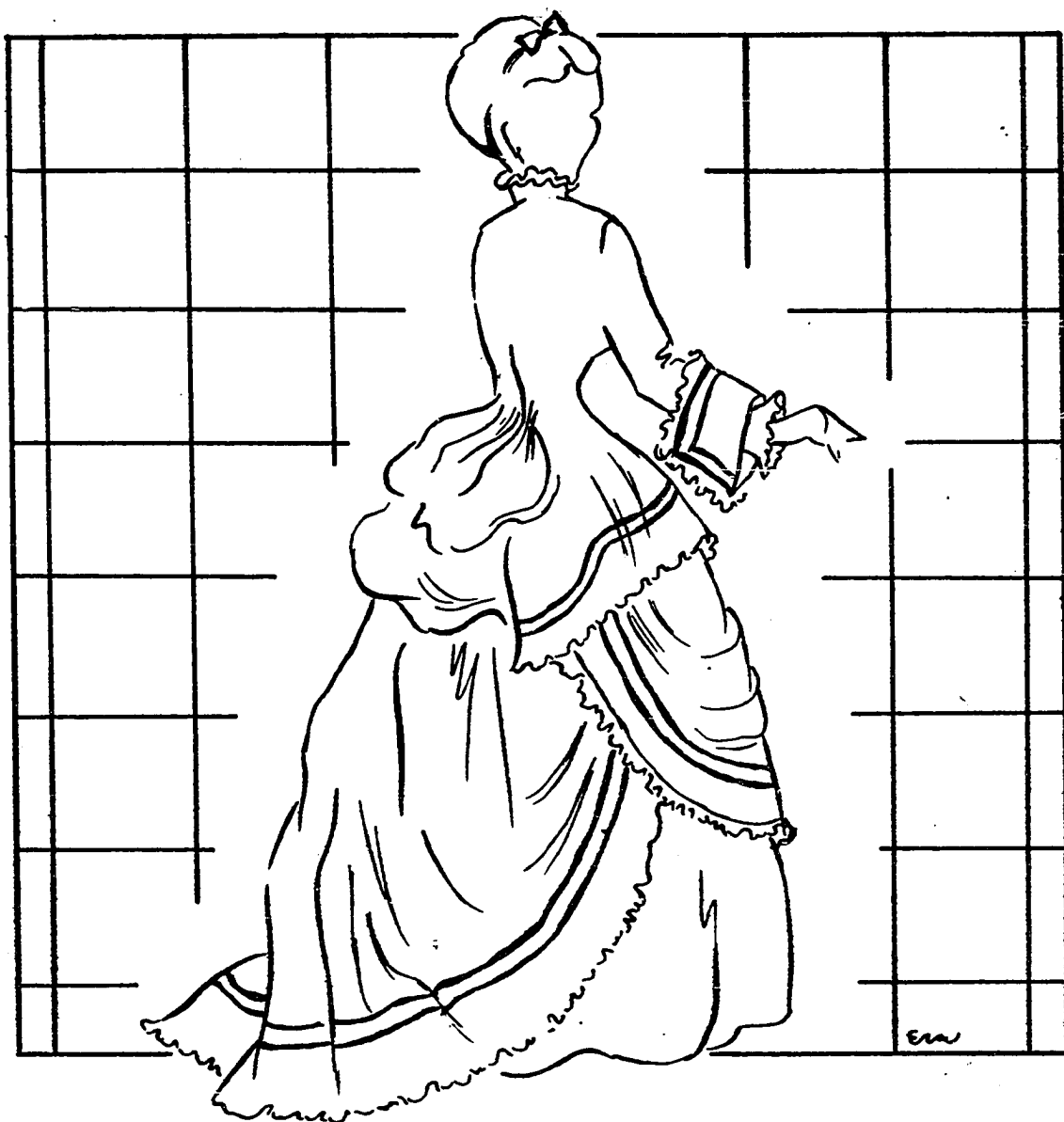
Fashionable dress from 1870 to ~~1889~~ was based upon a new skirt form which had been gradually developed from the bell shape of the previous period. The wide, even flare of the bell silhouette was flattened at the sides, and the fullness of the skirt was placed to the back of the figure. Manipulation and decorative handling of the excess fullness in the skirt created the "bustle." This was an extension in the back of the skirt which dominated the silhouette of fashionable dress until the end of the 1880's.

Typical dress of the period. The typical dress of the period dominated by the bustle silhouette is illustrated in Figure 3. This dress of 1870 shows the clearly defined bustle shape which had been developed from the previous silhouette. The dress in the sketch shows the usual tight, smoothly-fitted bodice which was combined with the bulky skirt. The bodice had a high neckline which extended up to a band around the throat. Sleeves were fitted close at the shoulder and upper arm, but they flared wide at the wrist. Frequently decorative trimming on the lower sleeves repeated decorations on the skirt. The skirt shown in the sketch is just one of the many variations of the bustle. This costume of 1870 shows an overskirt pulled back, looped and draped, and allowed to fall to the floor. This back fullness was supported by pads or wire forms incorporated in the undergarments.<sup>1</sup> Petticoats and corsets also assisted in the achievement of the fashionable shape. The bustle treatment extended even to the arrangement of the hair. A chignon, an addition of a mass of false hair at the back of the head, was worn with this early version of the bustle silhouette.

Changes in dress. The general contour of the bustle silhouette was retained from 1870 until 1889, but the fashions of this period showed a greater frequency of change. The maximum extensions and extremes beyond which fashion could not go were reached much more quickly than in the preceding period. There were several versions of

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<sup>1</sup>Lucy Barton, Historic Costume for the Stage (Boston: Walter H. Baker Company, 1935), p. 476.



**FIGURE 3**  
**THE DRESS OF 1870**

the bustle. There were changes in the size, placement, and manner of manipulation of the fullness of the skirt. These changes altered fashionable dress while maintaining the basic bustle silhouette.

The fashions of the early seventies utilized the increasing amounts of available fabrics to increase the size of the bustle. The extension at the back of the figure became larger, more complicated in its drapery, and more elaborately decorated.<sup>2</sup> The maximum point of extension and bulk was reached by 1875. The dress of that year, illustrated in Figure 4, was dominated by an extremely massive bustle. Pouffs, draperies, bows, and pleated edgings were all combined to create a bustle of sufficient proportions to be acceptable to fashionable women.

The upper part of the body was still fitted smoothly with a trim bodice. The neckline was quite high up onto the throat, and the sleeves were cut to fit close at the shoulder and upper arm. The severity of the bodice was relieved by ruffles at the neck and the wrists.

Fashionable dress of the latter half of the seventies showed a gradual reduction in the size of the bustle and the width of the skirt. The front of the skirt was cut very straight and narrow. The bustle was dropped quite low in the back of the skirt. Its size was minimized, but the bustle continued to be used. There was a trend toward closeness of fit which was just the opposite of the increased expansion in

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<sup>2</sup>Rose Netzorg Kerr, 100 Years of Costumes in America (Massachusetts: The Davis Press, Inc., 1951), p. 18.



FIGURE 4

THE DRESS OF 1875



the bustle-type skirt worn during the first half of the decade.

The upper portion of the costume of the seventies continued to be closely fitted. The bodice was extended to fit below the waistline and over the hips.<sup>3</sup> The result was a form-revealing garment which emphasized the contours of the female figure.

The ultimate point in closeness of fit of the bodice and narrowness of the skirt front was reached by 1880. Figure 5 illustrates the dress of 1880 by showing a back view. This sketch is typical of the exaggerated pulling of drapery to the back of the skirt and the low placement of the bustle which characterized the bustle silhouette of the eighties.

The silhouette of the 1880's was achieved only through the use of underclothing and corsets which molded the body into the desired contour and posture. The upper part of the body was restricted by corsets which tilted the figure forward. The lower part of the body was pushed backward from the waist. Paddings, linings, and stays assisted in producing the fashionable curves. The discomforts of the corsets and fortified undergarments were so great that health corsets were designed to be worn under the more fashionable variety.<sup>4</sup> The costumes of the eighties did achieve an appearance of elegance and refined gracefulness, but they were most effective when the wearer was standing in the fashionable posture.

Soon after 1880 the lower part of the silhouette was changed again. A swing back to the fullness of the bustle was well established

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<sup>3</sup>Oskar Fischel and Max Von Boehn, Modes and Manners of the Nineteenth Century (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1927), IV, pp. 81-82.

<sup>4</sup>Kerr, op. cit., p. 23.

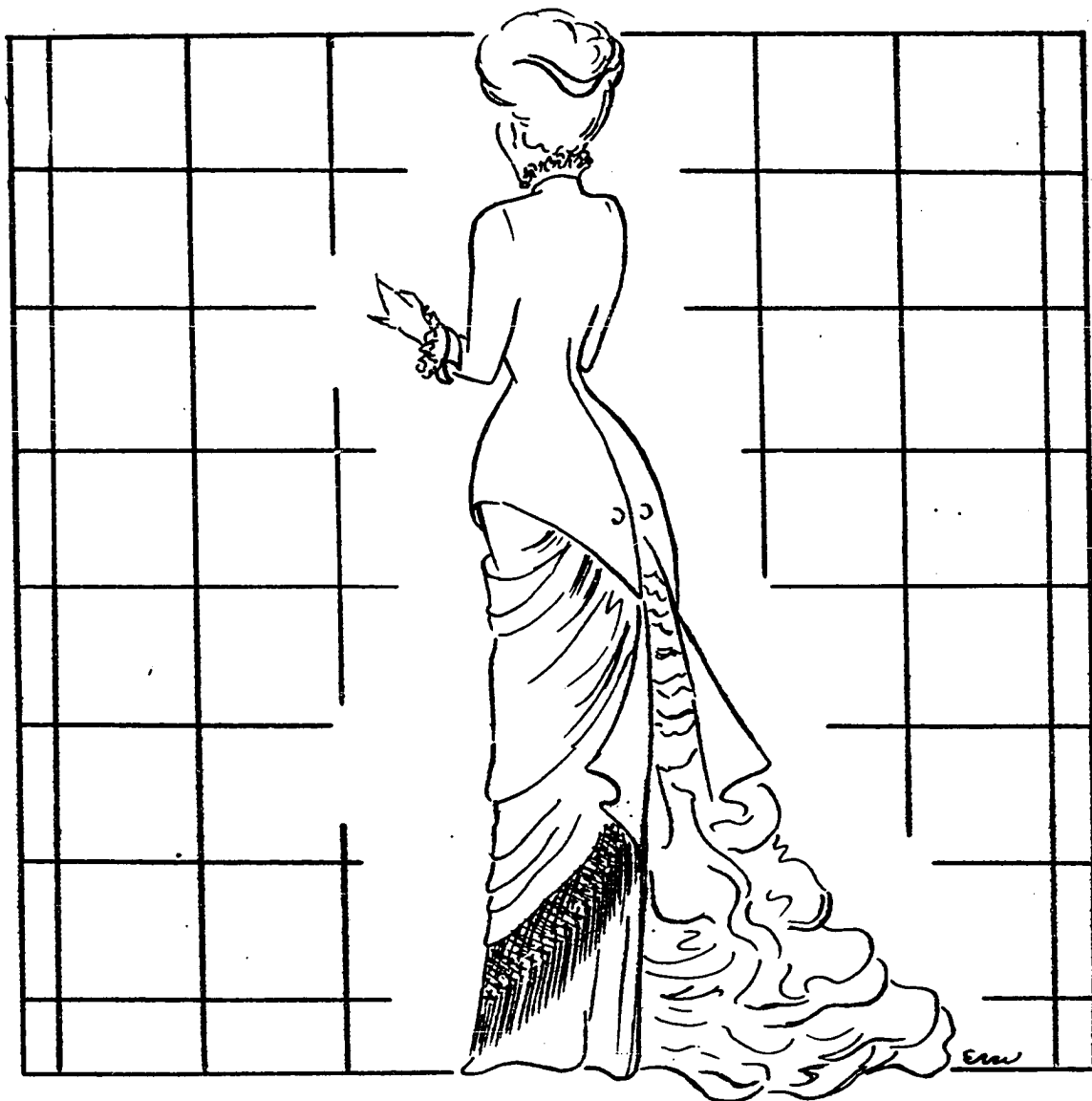


FIGURE 5

THE DRESS OF 1880

by 1882. A trend toward a lessening of the restrictions of the skirt front was indicated by a loosening of the drapery as it was pulled to the back for the bustle. The back of the skirt became increasingly extended and elaborate in the manipulation of the drapery from the skirt front. The bustle was placed higher upon the hips. The result was a shape which was much less pleasing than the previous version.<sup>5</sup>

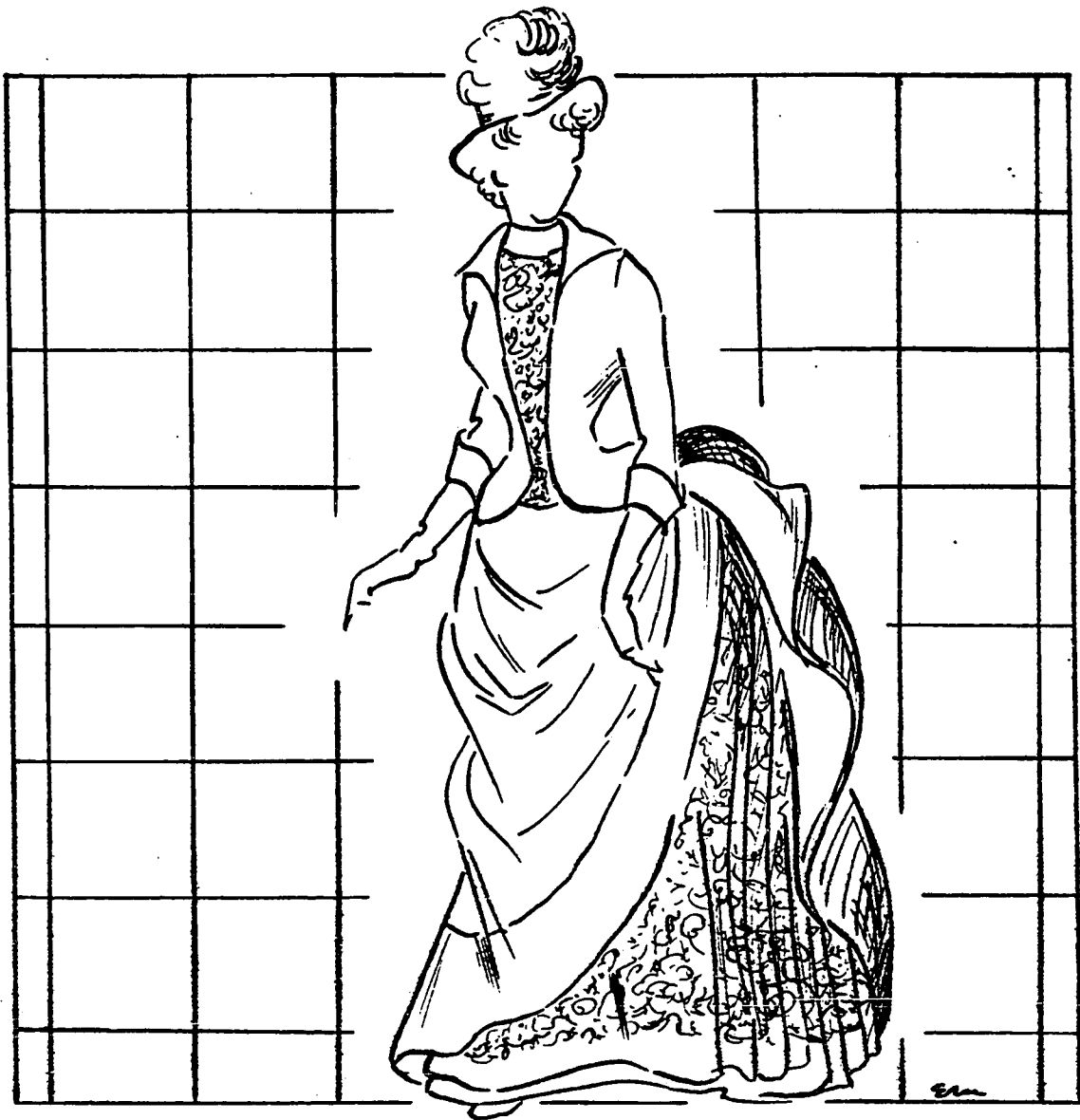
The point of greatest exaggeration of the bustle and back drapery was reached by 1886. Figure 6 shows a representative costume of that year. The upper part of the dress retained its closeness of fit, but the bustle assumed greater proportions than ever before. A trim, tailored bodice seemed to emphasize the bulky skirt which distorted the figure.

The exaggerated bustle was reduced in size soon after 1886. Skirt fullness continued to be placed at the back of the figure. The excess material was arranged so as to fall straight to the floor from the waistline. The pulling and draping to which the skirt had been subjected was minimized. By 1888 the bustle was considerably reduced in size. During the following year the bustle ceased to be used in fashionable dress.

The pendulum-like swing of the bustle silhouette from 1870 to 1889 is characteristic of fashions which reach a point of exaggeration. Kroeber pointed out that the long swings of fashion change extend over

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<sup>5</sup>Barton, op. cit., p. 478.



**FIGURE 6**  
**THE DRESS OF 1886**

a period of time as long as a century.<sup>6</sup> An examination of shorter periods reveals the same tendency. An explanation Kroeber advances for the progression of dress fashions to wearable limits is one of aesthetics. He makes the statement that styles "usually unfold in a progressive manner until the potentialities contained in the beginning efforts have been exhausted, thus reaching a culmination or 'maximum'."<sup>7</sup> It might also be added that a point of practicality is soon reached in any extremity in dress design. The rendering of the wearer helpless and useless is quite often the point at which exaggeration swings back in the opposite direction. The swing between extremes in the bustle silhouette is illustrative of the exaggeration of a design detail to the point of being extremely impractical.

The fashions within this period are illustrative of H. G. Barnett's assumption that changes occur within the maximal and minimal boundaries set by the expectations of change. The varied interpretations of the bustle remained within the realm of changes which were possible within the basic interpretation of the bustle silhouette. According to Barnett, the expectation of change always envisages limits upon its operation, and change falls within the framework of a limited pattern.<sup>8</sup> The swing from a maximum to a minimum sized

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<sup>6</sup>Alfred L. Kroeber, Style and Civilizations (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1957), pp. 9-10.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>8</sup>H. G. Barnett, Innovation (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1953), pp. 56-57.

bustle, which took place not once but twice during this period, was indicative of changes in fashion which were limited by the basic silhouette. Until the changes in fashion prompted a change of silhouette, variations in the size, shape, and placement of the bustle kept alterations in fashionable dress within the boundaries of change expectancy during the interval from 1870 to 1889.

This was an era of extreme and rapid changes of fashion which lacked beauty and aesthetic appeal. The years 1870-1889 marked the use of clothing for attracting attention, display, and the proclamation of social position. Purposefully, fashionable dress was altered more rapidly and the silhouette interpreted in a more extreme manner than previously in order to accomplish these ends. The emphasis upon wealth, which characterized this period, was held accountable by Thorstein Veblen for both the rapidity of change in fashion and the creation of costumes which were offensive to sound taste.<sup>9</sup> His contention that such a situation as existed during this interval of wealth and leisure fostered a lack of taste is borne out by the fashions of the day. The many versions of the bustle distorted the natural figure and created shapes which were ugly. The excessive use of decoration and the elaborate manipulation of fabric created impressive costumes. They did not, however, convey either pleasing taste or beauty.

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<sup>9</sup>Thorstein B. Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class (New York: The Modern Library, Inc., 1934), pp. 180-186.

The Relationship of Change in Selected Objective Aspects  
of the Social Situation to Fashionable Dress

The objective aspects of the social situation which were considered most significant in a consideration of change in this study were: technological developments, economic developments, social stratification, and the family and status of women. The relationship of change in these aspects to fashionable dress was examined for the period from 1870 to 1889 for comparison with previous and subsequent intervals of time.

Technological developments. The industrialization process, based upon technological developments, continued at a more rapid pace than had been possible during the earlier years of the nineteenth century. The pursuit of the natural sciences brought about improved techniques and methods of manufacturing. Better trained scientists and engineers applied newly discovered facts to useful means for improving old industries and creating new ones.<sup>10</sup> There was a wider spread and a speeding up of machine industry during the interval between 1870 and 1889.

Technological developments brought many changes to the Western world after 1870. The utilization of new materials, new methods, and new sources of power stimulated improvements in transportation, communication, and manufacturing. Agricultural as well as factory

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<sup>10</sup>Carlton J. H. Hayes, A Political and Cultural History of Modern Europe (shorter revised ed.; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1939), II, 205-207.

production was influenced by the new methods of mechanization. Home life, especially in the growing urban areas, was made increasingly comfortable and convenient.

Many new inventions appeared during this period. Americans still relied upon the theoretical work of European scientists, but they were quite successful in their trial and error methods of invention and adaptation. Electric lighting, electric trams and street cars, the telephone, the phonograph, the typewriter, the bicycle, cameras, and "artificial silk" were contributions of the inventors of Europe and the United States. Many other "ideas" which were to be developed later had their beginning during this stimulating period.<sup>11</sup>

The textile industry, one of the oldest and one of the first to feel the effects of mechanization, responded to the new machines and faster methods. The quantities of traditional materials and new textures of cotton, wool, and linen which could be produced were greatly increased. France and Italy expanded their production of silk to create many new luxurious and rich fabrics. The growing list of available materials for dress included crepe, poplin, batiste, pique, lawn, grenadine, organdie, voile, gauze, satin, taffeta, velvet, dotted swiss, dimity, net, lace, and a variety of silks.<sup>12</sup>

The discovery of the new aniline dyes made possible a more plentiful and more brilliant supply of coloring agents. The coal-tar

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 210-213.

<sup>12</sup>Carolyn G. Bradley, Western World Costume (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1954), p. 311.



dyes were scarcely an improvement over the natural dyes, but they made available a variety of bright, clear colors for textile fabrics. Strong greens, yellow, "electric" blue, and magenta were favorite hues applied to both plain and patterned materials for dress.<sup>13</sup>

The development of the sewing machine greatly affected dress design and the growth of the clothing industry. Much of the decorative detail of this period was created by the manipulation and stitching of fabric with the aid of the sewing machine. Rufflers, pleaters, hemmers, folders, tuckers, binders, puffers, braiders, and quilters were used to make lavish trimmings.<sup>14</sup> Tailoring and more precise workmanship were made possible through the use of the sewing machine. Although most of the better quality dressmaking and tailoring continued to be done in the home by skilled seamstresses, the sewing machine promoted factory production of clothing. Mass-production methods put clothing upon an economical ready-to-wear basis after the 1870's.<sup>15</sup>

The invention of the paper dress pattern was another contribution to the dress of the period. Ebenezer Butterick and his wife, Ellen, created paper guides for women to follow in cutting and copying the garments pictured in fashion magazines.<sup>16</sup> The typical woman of fashion combined her skills with the sewing machine and the needle

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<sup>13</sup>Barton, op. cit., p. 484.

<sup>14</sup>Carrie A. Hall, From Hoopskirts to Nudity (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1938), pp. 42-46.

<sup>15</sup>David L. Cohn, The Good Old Days (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940), p. 420.

<sup>16</sup>Hall, op. cit., p. 8.

with the paper patterns available to create colorful and individual costumes for her needs.

The typewriter, created and commercially manufactured in the early 1870's, was an extremely important factor in the social situation for women in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Larus writes, "That invention...came at the psychological moment in the history of American womanhood."<sup>17</sup> It was the typewriter which opened up new avenues for the efforts of women. It led not only to a change in her dress, but also to a significant change in her status.

Economic developments. The economic growth and development of the Western world corresponded to the technological and industrial expansion of the leading European nations. France, although its development was not as spectacular after 1870 as it had been under the Second Empire, maintained steady employment for its people and stable prices. There was still a market for the luxury products of French manufacture. The difficulties of the French government did not interfere with the work of the Parisian couturiers. The House of Worth, favorite of the Empress, continued in spite of Eugenie's flight from the country.<sup>18</sup> A general level of prosperity prevailed throughout the interval between 1870 and 1889.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>John Rouse Larus, Woman (Philadelphia: George Barrie & Sons, 1908), X, 369.

<sup>18</sup>Barton, op. cit., p. 461.

<sup>19</sup>Albert Guerard, France (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1959), p. 349.

The economic development of the United States was in keeping with the tremendous industrial spread of an expanding nation. There was a decided shift from an agrarian economy to an industrial economy after 1870. The United States was a land of medium and small businesses at this time, but changing transportation and communication systems created a trend toward a nation-wide market and a national economy.<sup>20</sup>

The expansion of businesses in both size and number in the United States brought about new methods of operation and finance. The necessity for eliminating the wastefulness of the competitive factors which characterized individually owned and operated businesses brought about cooperation. The era of the corporation, trusts, and monopolies was initiated in 1879 with John D. Rockefeller's establishment of the Standard Oil Company. Mergers in other leading industries made it possible for a few strong leaders to dominate the economic structure. This was the beginning of great economic empires and private fortunes. A relatively small group of so-called "captains of industry" and financiers had come to control a considerable portion of the economic wealth of the nation by 1870.<sup>21</sup>

The emphasis upon an industrial economy brought about greater repercussions of the business cycles upon the American public. Repeated shifts from prosperity to depression through the catalyst of

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<sup>20</sup>Merle Curti, Richard H. Shryock, Thomas C. Cochran, and Fred Harvey Harrington, An American History (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), II, pp. 40-41.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

a panic became the economic pattern of this era. The prosperity of the post-Civil War period was interrupted by the panic of 1873. The depression which followed lasted until the early eighties. Over-investment, rising prices and wages, and speculative booms in land and securities were instrumental in creating the panic of 1883. The miseries of unemployment and physical distress were repeated again in the slump period which lasted just as long as it had in the previous decade. However, the optimism and faith in the American economy never seemed to falter. The people of the United States recovered from the depression periods and continued to maintain a better level of living than those of other nations of the latter nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup>

This was also an era when the ability to acquire money and power must be shown to others. It was a time when money was being made rapidly by men, and women were given the privilege of spending it. Florid elegance and ostentatious display began to dominate clothing and home furnishings. Enormous mansions were erected at desirable city addresses and on wide-spreading country estates. Fifth Avenue houses staffed with hired help became the hallmarks of success in America. These mansions were stuffed with expensive furniture, statuary, pictures, and decorative objects from all over the world. Such luxurious quarters became the settings for a leisured manner of living and lavish entertainment. Hostesses vied with each other in

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 41-42.

the extravagances of food and decoration which loaded their banquet and party tables.<sup>23</sup>

Fashionable dress proclaimed the increased wealth of the era through extravagances which only the rich could afford. The bustle was a means of impressing others through its waste of material. It was an example of Veblen's "conspicuous consumption." Many yards of material and quantities of decoration were put into a completely useless bustle. It was a device upon which lavishness could be extended for no other purpose than to display the ability to afford such waste. To Veblen, an economist, dress had become synonymous with "display of wasteful expenditure."<sup>24</sup> Not only did the fashions of the day waste vast quantities of materials, they also prevented the wearer from engaging in any useful activity. This, to Veblen, was a further instance of the wastefulness of the era.<sup>25</sup> Only great wealth and the desire to display such wealth could prompt such fashions as were created during the period dominated by the bustle silhouette.

Social stratification. The social class system of the Western world reflected the changes in the technological and economic developments of the latter portion of the nineteenth century. Following 1870 the wealthy and economically secure gained greater power and

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<sup>23</sup>Eric John Dingwall, The American Woman (New York: Rinehart & Co., Inc., 1957), pp. 117-118.

<sup>24</sup>Thorstein Veblen, "The Economic Theory of Women's Dress," Essays in Our Changing Order, ed. Leon Ardzrooni (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), pp. 65-77.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

social prestige. This group contributed further to the breakdown of the aristocracy of blood and land.<sup>26</sup> The industrialist and the financier attained new status. Even the industrial workers attained a more important place in the social system of the seventies and eighties.<sup>27</sup>

The class structure of France and other industrialized European countries was dominated by the wealthy industrialists and financiers. In France the "bourgeoisie" became the upper class and the prestige group of the nation. Their increasing number and wealth extended the pre-eminence of this group into every sphere of life. After 1870 finance, politics, industry and commerce, the bar, medicine, the press, literature, science, and even fashions were dominated by this new upper class. Their mode of life served as a model for the French nation.<sup>28</sup>

The increasing industrialization of the nation and the emphasis upon business created a more important middle class group in France. Termed the "petite bourgeoisie," this rather vaguely defined group was made up of the professions, the subordinates in commercial banks and officers, small shop keepers, and artisans. They occupied a position between the wealthy upper class and the workers of the lower class.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Charles Seignobos, The Evolution of the French People (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1938), p. 351.

<sup>27</sup>Robert M. MacIver and Charles H. Page, Society (New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1949), p. 382.

<sup>28</sup>Seignobos, op. cit., pp. 351-352.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

The mode of life in every social stratum in France changed with the increase in wealth and prosperity of the era. The new upper class acquired many tastes from the English which were different from the French tradition of the old aristocrats. The classes below this new upper class modeled their way of living after the new prestige group. Their food, clothing, manners, speech, and amusements were as similar to those of the wealthy as their economic resources would permit. Distinctions were maintained, however, by subtleties of fashion in dress and in the residences of the different classes.<sup>30</sup>

The decade following 1870 marked a turning point in the social class structure in the United States. The old families of the Southern planter aristocracy and the Eastern seaboard were able to absorb the new rich into the upper class until the flood of the new plutocracy became too great.<sup>31</sup> With the establishment of new fortunes made in the utilities, oil, lumber, and the railroads, came an increased emphasis upon a new group as the upper stratum of the American social structure.<sup>32</sup> This group was called "Society," and has been described by Max Lerner as, "Somewhere in between an aristocracy of blood and land and a power elite of acquired wealth."<sup>33</sup> New York,

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 356-357.

<sup>31</sup>Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, The Rise of American Civilization (The Macmillan Co., 1937), II, 387.

<sup>32</sup>MacIver and Page, op. cit., p. 383.

<sup>33</sup>Max Lerner, America as a Civilization (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), p. 481.

the setting for the activities of this group, had become the center of social life in the United States by 1880.<sup>34</sup>

The middle and lower classes which made up the bulk of the population of the United States were emerging as distinctive groups during this period of the seventies and eighties. The middle classes were made up of independent farmers, shopkeepers, small businessmen, the middlemen, and the professionals. The working classes consisted of farm and factory workers. Class differences were less clearly defined between these two groups than between them and the upper class. The majority of Americans continued to hold the traditional middle class values of democracy and independence in spite of the differentiations of the social structure.

There was a tendency for the classes to become similar rather than to enforce the differences. There was less distance between the classes, since all the levels of the social structure followed the lead of the prestige group. The imitation of the upper, or prestige class, has been pointed out by Gabriel de Tarde as tending to democratize a nation and to equalize the classes.<sup>35</sup> The fundamental law of imitation, according to Tarde, is that the superior groups are imitated by the inferior groups. When imitation occurs, distinctions

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<sup>34</sup>E. Digby Baltzell, "Who's Who in America" and "The Social Register": Elite and Upper Class Indexes in Metropolitan America," Class, Status and Power, eds. Reinhard Bendix and Seymour Martin Lipset (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1953), p. 175.

<sup>35</sup>Gabriel de Tarde, Social Laws (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1907), p. 369.



between classes become blurred.<sup>36</sup> The imitation of fashion in dress was one of the means of minimizing the social class differences in the social structure of the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The family and status of women. The family and the home remained the chief concern of the majority of women during this interval between 1870 and 1889. Principal changes in the family and the status of women may be attributed to the influences of technological developments and expanded industrialization. An increase in the number of families living in urban areas and increased comforts and conveniences in the home marked an initiation of trends which were to become more clearly defined toward the end of the century.<sup>37</sup>

The many new inventions brought about by the technological developments of the era made the work of women in the home a little less difficult and less time consuming. New methods of lighting, heating, and cooking lightened the daily burden of homemaking. Women gradually widened the scope of their activities beyond the confines of their homes.

The aids to homemaking made it possible for women to work outside the home. In both France and the United States women began to acquire a certain amount of economic independence by working. The number of women who actually worked outside the home gradually increased through this interval following 1870. In that year, the percentage of women of the United States who were sixteen years of

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>37</sup>Curti, et al. An American History, op. cit., p. 75.

age or older and gainfully employed was 14.8. By 1880, this employed group had increased to 16.0 per cent. The census of 1890 indicated that during the decade preceding, there had been an increase of 3 per cent; so that 19.0 per cent of the women over sixteen were working outside the home.<sup>38</sup>

A significant change in the social level of working women and the types of jobs held by women could be detected about this time. Previous to 1870 most women worked in factories to supplement meager family incomes. There had been an increase in the number of women teaching after the war. After 1870, more women were being hired as stenographers, telephone operators, and clerical workers. These jobs were held predominantly by women by the end of the eighties.<sup>39</sup>

There was also greater interest in education for women at this time. Women's colleges in America and Europe were established for an increased number of women students. The University of Michigan admitted women students, and Blount College in Tennessee became the first co-educational college in the United States. Upper middle class families sent not only their sons, but also their daughters to college.<sup>40</sup>

Change in the role and status of women in the social situation began to become apparent during this period in spite of the

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<sup>38</sup>James H. S. Bossard, Social Changes and Social Problems (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1934), p. 564.

<sup>39</sup>Curti, et al. An American History, op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

general contention that woman's place was in the home. The desire for higher education and economic independence brought some women into the professional and business world which had hitherto been reserved for men. Women also used their growing freedom to escape from unsatisfactory homes. The number of divorces increased during this period.<sup>41</sup> There were only 3.1 divorces per 100 marriages in 1870. The figure increased to 4.3 in 1880, and by 1890 the number of divorces per 100 marriages stood at 5.9. This signified increased opportunities for women outside the home, but the majority of women felt their major contribution was to be made within the home and to their families.

A movement toward equality for women was present during this period, but it remained in the background. Most women workers did not demand recognition or equality; they simply went to work.<sup>42</sup> There were some, however, who were active in their demands and fervently worked toward an attainment of equal rights with men. These women also attempted to obtain equality in some matters which were not usually the concern of women. The majority of women did not support these "reformers," since they did not interpret the situation in the same manner. Most women did not feel a necessity for establishing equality with men.

The suffrage movement had its beginning during this period although it was not supported by the majority of women. The efforts

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<sup>41</sup>Ray E. Baber, Marriage and the Family (2nd. ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1953), p. 446.

<sup>42</sup>Larus, op. cit., p. 370.

of such women as Mrs. Belva Lockwood, who announced her candidacy for the presidency of the United States in 1884, and Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who devoted her life to efforts for the "emancipation" of women, were not generally appreciated.<sup>43</sup> The Women's Christian Temperance Union, organized in 1874, was one of the more successful attempts to arouse and to train women for public work. It accomplished more for women's suffrage and women in politics than any previous movement.<sup>44</sup> The women themselves frequently opposed such movements, since they saw no need for change. Most women failed to appreciate the attempts to secure the vote for them.

Some of the increasing freedom for women was channeled into physical activities. There was greater interest in leisurely strolling, skating, and boating. The more active sports - archery, croquet, and lawn tennis - were popular in 1870. They continued to attract a greater number of feminine enthusiasts during the following decades.

There were no special costumes for these activities.<sup>45</sup> Women continued to wear their usual daytime dresses in spite of the restrictions to their movements. The strenuous activity required for these sports, especially tennis, may have forced a loosening of the corset strings.<sup>46</sup> Only the riding habit, which retained the flowing

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<sup>43</sup>Larus, op. cit., p. 371.

<sup>44</sup>Carrie Chapman Catt, "Woman Suffrage and Politics," America Through Women's Eyes, ed. Mary Beard (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), pp. 379-380.

<sup>45</sup>Rose Kerr Netzog, op. cit., pp. 38-39.

<sup>46</sup>Barton, op. cit., p. 420.

skirts and the petticoats of the usual dress of the time, was considered a special costume for an outdoor activity.

Throughout this period the interests of most women remained within their homes, but an increasing number of outside activities brought women into a previously male-dominated world. A few women could foresee the desirability of women's suffrage and equality, but the majority of women failed to support efforts toward an achievement of women's rights. Many women were quite happy and content to find their place within the home.

The Relationship of Change in Selected Subjective Aspects  
of the Social Situation to Fashionable Dress

Fashionable dress worn during the interval between 1870 and 1889 was dominated by the lavishly decorated bustle. This detail of dress, entirely superfluous and lacking in beauty, was worn by women as an interpretation of the situation in which they found themselves. It may be postulated that the bustle embodied a rather materialistic assessment of a situation dominated by acquired wealth and social position but tempered by the remnants of the romantic and feminine aspects of the previous era.

The social situation after 1870 was marked by an increasing emphasis upon wealth and materialism. The acquisition of money and power was reflected in a striving for social prestige. This was a period of acquired social position in the class structure of society. A new importance was given to the stratification of social groups,

and a greater class consciousness existed during this interval than in the previous period.

The romanticism of the crinoline period and the bell silhouette was retained somewhat, but it was being replaced by a more realistic and purposeful appraisal of the position of women in the social structure. Women still expressed their femininity and dependence upon men. There were portents, however, of a movement toward equality.

Changes in the subjective aspects of the social situation were detected by perceptive women. Fashionable women, "definers of the situation," portrayed their assessment of their position in society through the media of dress.

Wealth and materialism. Unprecedented prosperity and the presence of ample means for creating wealth led to a strong emphasis upon the acquisition of wealth. The materialism which accompanies a money economy permeated almost all aspects of social activity during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The practical phases of making money, directing banks, organizing industrial corporations, devising machinery, and applying scientific facts created a materialistic society. Large private fortunes were amassed and used lavishly for display and enjoyment.

The fashions of the day, dominated by the bustle, were expressive of the emphasis upon wealth and the use of available resources for practical purposes. The availability of large amounts of dress fabrics

and the ability to pay for them were made apparent by the expanding size and shape of the silhouette. The bustle, a purely decorative portion of the design of the dress, became more complicated in its drapery and trimming as the emphasis upon wealth and materialism became greater. Women of fashion demonstrated their willingness to put so much fabric and expense into a completely useless appendage. The display of newly acquired wealth achieved greater importance in dress than the enhancement of the wearer.

This emphasis upon the display of wealth was deplored by Thorstein Veblen in his discussion of the leisured class. The overall term "conspicuous consumption" which Veblen applied to other aspects of social life of this period<sup>47</sup> may be aptly applied to the dress of the bustle period. The bustle was certainly conspicuous and consumed yards and yards of material. It was quite useless and not even beautiful. A detail such as the bustle could be worn only among people of wealth and a philosophy which prompted the display of wealth.

The frequency of change in fashion may also be attributed to the materialism of the era. The basic silhouette was maintained through several alterations of the bustle. The bustle changed several times within the period. According to Veblen, a pecuniary culture places greater emphasis upon the frequency of change of fashion in dress.<sup>48</sup> The women of this interval between 1870 and 1889 portrayed

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<sup>47</sup>Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class, op. cit., p. 167.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., pp. 185-186.

their definition of the materialistic society of the times by changing the size and shape of the bustle frequently.

Veblen also observed that the more rapidly fashions shift and change in a materialistic society, the more offensive they are to sound taste. The varying styles are less concerned with beauty than with change. The results are usually ugly and grotesque.<sup>49</sup> This observation might be applied to the fashions of this period. The bustle distorted the figure into an unpleasing shape. Corseting and padding created a fashionable figure and posture which put women on display. Women interpreted their situation and their role as means for exhibiting the wealth of their households. They selected and wore garments which proclaimed their place in a materialistic society.

Acquired social position. The class structure of the Western world became less clearly defined with increased possibilities of acquiring social position. Wealth supplanted all other criteria for membership in the upper classes. The burgher class dominated the political, economic, and social activities of Paris and the French. The founders of fortunes in America became the prestige group and moved into established "Society." The upper classes were made up of the rising industrialists. These became the prestige classes of Western society.

The new wealthy classes served as models for the groups occupying lower strata in society. The possibilities of acquiring a

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., pp. 184-186.



position in the desired class level prompted the imitation of those who had already moved up. These were considered the superior classes, and they were imitated regardless of their lack of taste.<sup>50</sup> The wealthy classes of the United States imitated the fashions of Paris in spite of their lack of competent fashion leaders.

The women of the lower social levels were able to recognize the significance of dress in the acquisition of social status. They imitated the costumes worn by those they considered to be in a superior position. In the competition for prestige, fashionable women turned to the use of novel interpretations of the bustle. Changes, fostered by the desire for novelty, quickly reached extremes.<sup>51</sup> The bustle, while retained as expressive of the situation of the period, reached a maximum interpretation several times within the interval dominated by the bustle silhouette.

Widespread imitation of the superior classes had a democratizing effect upon society.<sup>52</sup> The same general characteristics of dress were found at all class levels. However, some women were aware of the effect of imitation upon the different social levels. They attempted to reinforce the class differences by subtleties of dress which were not quickly apparent but existed nevertheless.

Realism. The women faced with the social situation of a materialistic society were much less romantic and more realistic in

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<sup>50</sup>Tarde, Social Laws, op. cit., p. 369.

<sup>51</sup>Barnett, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>52</sup>Tarde, loc. cit.

their definition of that society. Fashionable dress became increasingly important and purposeful. Women's dress had been a means for creating beauty. Less interest in romanticism eliminated the search for beauty and substituted a more realistic approach to the usefulness of dress.

The costumes of the bustle era served a purpose. They were utilized to express the wealth and the social position of the households occupied by fashionable women. The bustle permitted variation, alteration, and change within a dominant silhouette. Costumes designed around the bustle were suited to the ostentation and display characteristic of a society of acquired wealth. Women interpreted their situation as demanding that they wear costumes expressive of the success of their men. They realized that clothing could effectively serve a purpose. The fashionable dress of the day served as a symbol and as a means of proclaiming wealth, social position, and success.

Femininity and dependency. Most women of this era were content to define their place as in the home and dependent upon the masculine sex. They were completely feminine and content to be so.

The clothing of the period after 1870 emphasized the apparent femininity of the women. Fashionable dress was confining and restrictive. The underclothing and corseting made women more helpless than in the previous period. The bustle was a device which added considerable weight to a costume and hampered the wearer's movements. The tightly fitted garments popular in 1880 made activity more difficult.

The elaborate use of decoration concentrated around luxurious trimmings, elaborate coiffures, and dainty accessories. Most fashionable costumes lacked beauty, but they interpreted a feminine role quite successfully.

The acquisition of wealth made women a more leisured group than formerly. Money made it possible for women to enjoy wearing clothes which were an insignia of leisure. Women were not expected to do much in the wealthier households. They could exhibit the ability of the house to support a person who could consume without producing.

The majority of women accepted the restrictions of fashionable dress and the role of feminine dependency. The few women who worked and the "reformers" who extended their efforts for the equality of women seemed to have had little effect upon fashionable dress. Not all women wore the dress of the leisured class or the extremes of Parisian fashion. However, most women followed the general characteristics of the bustle silhouette. The bustle was frequently modified, but it was worn by most women.

#### The Relationship of Crises in the Social Situation to Fashionable Dress

The major crisis of this period between 1870 and 1889 was the French war with Prussia in 1870. Following this event the interval was disturbed by instability and fluctuation rather than the intrusion of disruptive stimuli of a crisis nature. There was relative prosperity and peace between nations throughout the Western world at this

time. Most countries were concerned with their own affairs revolving around industrialization, nationalism, and colonial expansion.

Crises in France. The initial year of this interval between 1870 and 1889 was marked by the end of the Second Empire of Napoleon III and the war with Prussia. The political history of France within the period was dominated by internal struggles of governmental forces. The Third Republic was in constant threat until it became firmly established in 1875.<sup>53</sup> The government of the French republic was dominated by bourgeois politicians until 1879. The nation enjoyed favorable legislation to private property and to business because of the interests of the business men in the government. A rival group, the Republicans, took control after 1879 and pursued a stronger colonial policy. The expansion of French foreign possessions, which were well-governed, added to the total prosperity of the French nation.<sup>54</sup>

France lost prestige as a power on the European scene because of its shaky political structure. Paris, however, retained its position as an intellectual, artistic, and fashion center during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The Western world continued to look to France for many of the pleasurable aspects of living.

The establishment of the bustle silhouette as the dominant form of fashionable dress design coincided with crisis and change in the French government. The year 1870 was marked by the termination of the Second Empire of Napoleon III and Eugenie. The bell-shaped

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<sup>53</sup>Guerard, op. cit., p.337.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 354.

crinoline, which was worn throughout the duration of the Empire, was discarded shortly before 1870. The new bustle silhouette replaced the bell form at just about the time the Third Republic was replacing the Second Empire.

The general instability of governmental forces seemed to correspond to variations in fashionable dress. The rapidity of change in the interpretations of the bustle detail in dress coincided with the general insecurity of the French nation. France was still in the midst of political upheaval at the time the bustle was discarded. It was during the latter years of the eighties that the silhouette of fashionable dress assumed a new shape and contour.

Crises in the United States. The interval between 1870 and 1889 in the United States was a period of recovery from the Civil War. Industrial and economic expansion proceeded at such an accelerated rate that difficulties stemmed from over-expansion and unwise economic practices.

Major disruptions of a crisis nature in the United States were principally fluctuations in the economic stability of the nation. This period opened with an inflationary boom which lasted from 1869 until 1872. The Panic of 1873 interrupted the increasing prosperity of the era and precipitated a period of depression. The 1880's followed a similar pattern of economic fluctuation. A boom period in the early part of the decade was followed by the Panic of 1883 and a relatively short depression of about two years. Business and industry recovered rather quickly but seemed unable to avoid intervals of

economic stress.

The extent of the period during which the bustle was fashionable corresponded more to the political crises of France than to events in the United States. The tendency to extend the bustle to a maximum size and then to reduce it to minimum proportions corresponded relatively little to the economic fluctuations in the United States.

The points of change in the treatment of the bustle did not coincide with specific changes in the nation's economy. The size of the bustle was increased to a point of maximum extension in 1875, a depression year, and in 1886, which was the beginning of a boom period. The greatest reduction in the size of the bustle was made in 1880. This was at a time of economic prosperity.

It may be noted that there was a relationship between fluctuations in the economic situation and change in fashion. Crises in the nation's economy were sufficiently stimulating to prompt changes in dress. These were not basic changes, but they were alterations in the interpretation of the dominant detail of the dress designs utilizing the bustle silhouette.

CHAPTER V  
THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE FIRST TUBULAR SILHOUETTE  
IN DRESS TO THE SOCIAL SITUATION  
FROM 1890 TO 1907

The third interval of time in this study of fashion and social change marked the end of a century and the beginning of a new era. The European dominance of the Western World was still in force, but the Americans presented a more serious challenge than at any previous time in history. New techniques of mass production, an increased emphasis upon education, and scientific research brought industrialization to a new peak. Expansion into foreign holdings and the increasing economic prosperity of the Western nations tended to bring them together as world powers.

This period was the setting for the beginning of a new silhouette in dress. The tubular silhouette, which has dominated the basic contour of Western dress from the end of the nineteenth century until the present, was developed after the bustle was discarded. This silhouette is distinctive in that it follows the shape of the human form through the cut and fit of the waist and skirt. The long, tubular shape of the figure is conveyed throughout the costume. This tubular silhouette with variations in the structural lines of the waist and skirt has been maintained in women's dress since 1890.

There were three versions of the tubular form which must be considered as separate basic silhouettes. Unfortunately each lacks a distinctive name.<sup>1</sup> The first tubular silhouette was characterized by a full length skirt and closely fitted contours which followed the figure. The second version differed in that the shape and curves of the feminine figure were minimized and altered by fluctuations in the length of the waistline and the skirt. The third tubular silhouette was a return to the normal waistline and variations in the lengths and fullnesses of the skirt. Each represented an interpretation of the social situation at the time they were fashionable.

#### Fashionable Dress from 1890 to 1907

The period of the first tubular silhouette may be designated as the years during which the skirt was long, sometimes even trailing onto the ground, and the bodice was trim and fitted. The contours of the upper part of the figure were closely molded. The waistline was kept small and restricted. The basic tubular effect was emphasized by a straight and narrow skirt front. Any excessive fullness was placed to the back. There were variations of this form, but the general contour of the silhouette was sustained throughout this period.

Typical dress of the period. The typical dress of this period retained some of the features of the nineteenth century, but it introduced the new basic tubular silhouette. The costume after 1890

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<sup>1</sup>Oskar Fischel and Max Von Boehn, Modes and Manners of the Nineteenth Century (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1927), IV, 87.



demonstrates a transition from the bustle to a new form. The natural slender contour of the feminine figure was revealed and enhanced rather than distorted. Figure 7 illustrates a dress worn about 1890. This sketch shows the new emphasis upon the straight, form-fitting contour of the tubular silhouette. The skirt, although it retains some of the fullness of the previous decade, is shaped to fall straight to the floor in front.

There was a new emphasis upon sleeves during this period of the first tubular silhouette. Fischel and Von Boehn wrote:

As early as 1890 it was noticeable that the sleeve no longer followed the line of the arm above the elbow but was being made to stand high at the shoulder. By the following year the true "leg-of-mutton" sleeve had come in.<sup>2</sup>

Numerous alterations in the size and shape of the sleeves varied the upper portion of the costumes of this era.

The fashionable contour, illustrated in the costume of 1890, was dependent as much upon the use of restrictive undergarments as upon the cut and shaping of the dress. Corsets were extremely tight and confining to mold the figure into a foundation for a smoothly fitted dress. The nineties were the years during which the so-called "wasp waist" was popular.<sup>3</sup> A waistline of less than twenty inches was desired and frequently achieved by tightly laced corsets. Padding

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>3</sup>Lucy Barton, Historic Costume for the Stage (Boston: Walter H. Baker Company, 1935), p. 506.



**FIGURE 7**  
**THE DRESS OF 1890**

and figure improvers were worn by those who needed to reshape their figures to more closely resemble the idealized version.<sup>4</sup>

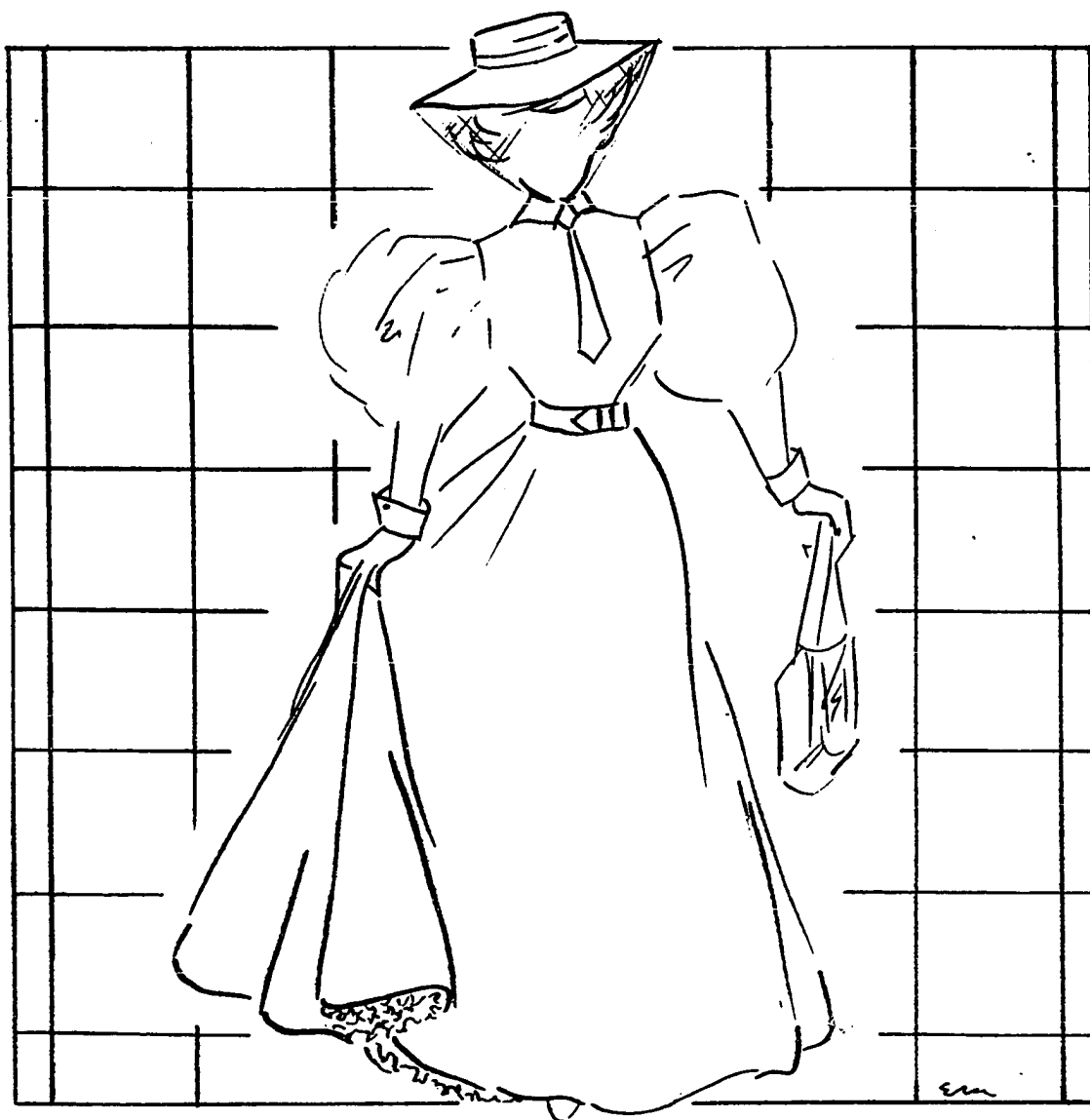
Change in dress. Changes in dress during the 1890's were principally in the upper part of the costume. The waistline became increasingly smaller and emphasized by a tightly pulled belt. The bodice became more loosely fitted. The sleeves became larger and dominated the total design. The steady progression in size of the sleeves reached a maximum point in 1896. After a year of enormous puffs at the upper part of the sleeves, fashionable women began to reduce the size of their sleeves and to minimize the importance of that portion of their costumes.

The dress of 1896, illustrated in Figure 8, shows the alterations in dress which occurred during the first half of the nineties. Changes in the sleeves were accompanied by a modification of the skirt. The width at the bottom of the skirt was increased. Additional flare at the hem gave much greater width to the base of the silhouette. A rather prim effect was achieved by the high collar and tie at the throat. The modesty of the neckline was counteracted by a display of petticoats beneath the sweeping skirt. "Dust ruffles," which literally swept the streets, were planned as part of the costume. They were manipulated and revealed in a coquettish manner or concealed according to the mood and inclination of the wearer.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Carolyn G. Bradley, Western World Costume (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1954), p. 332.

<sup>5</sup>Barton, op. cit., pp. 506-509.



**FIGURE 8**  
**THE DRESS OF 1896**

The achievement of practically maximum size in the puffs of the sleeves and the circumference of the skirt resulted in a swing back to a minimization of these details. By 1900 the long tubular contour of the human figure was almost completely outlined by a costume which fitted the form closely. Only a wide flare at the hem of the skirt, starting low on the hips, deviated from the contour of the body.

The shape of the fashionable silhouette was not that of the natural figure, however. The woman of 1900 was thoroughly corseted with even greater restrictions than in earlier periods. A new straight-front corset distorted the alignment of the body into an S-shape.<sup>6</sup> The bust was pushed forward and the hips pushed toward the back. The waistline was laced as tightly as possible. The resulting figure and posture were suited only for standing and for the display of the elegant costumes of the day.

The costume of 1900 was distinctive and charming in appearance. Figure 9 illustrates a pleasing design which portrays the elegance of the fashions of the period. The approved figure was achieved by the proper undergarments and outlined by the close-fitting dress. The body was completely covered from the high band collar at the throat to the swirling hem of the flared skirt. Even the sleeves extended down onto the wrists. The decorative detail was applied in a way to enhance the garment and to create a garment of beauty and taste.

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<sup>6</sup>Henny Harald Hansen, Costumes and Styles (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1956), pp. 149-150.

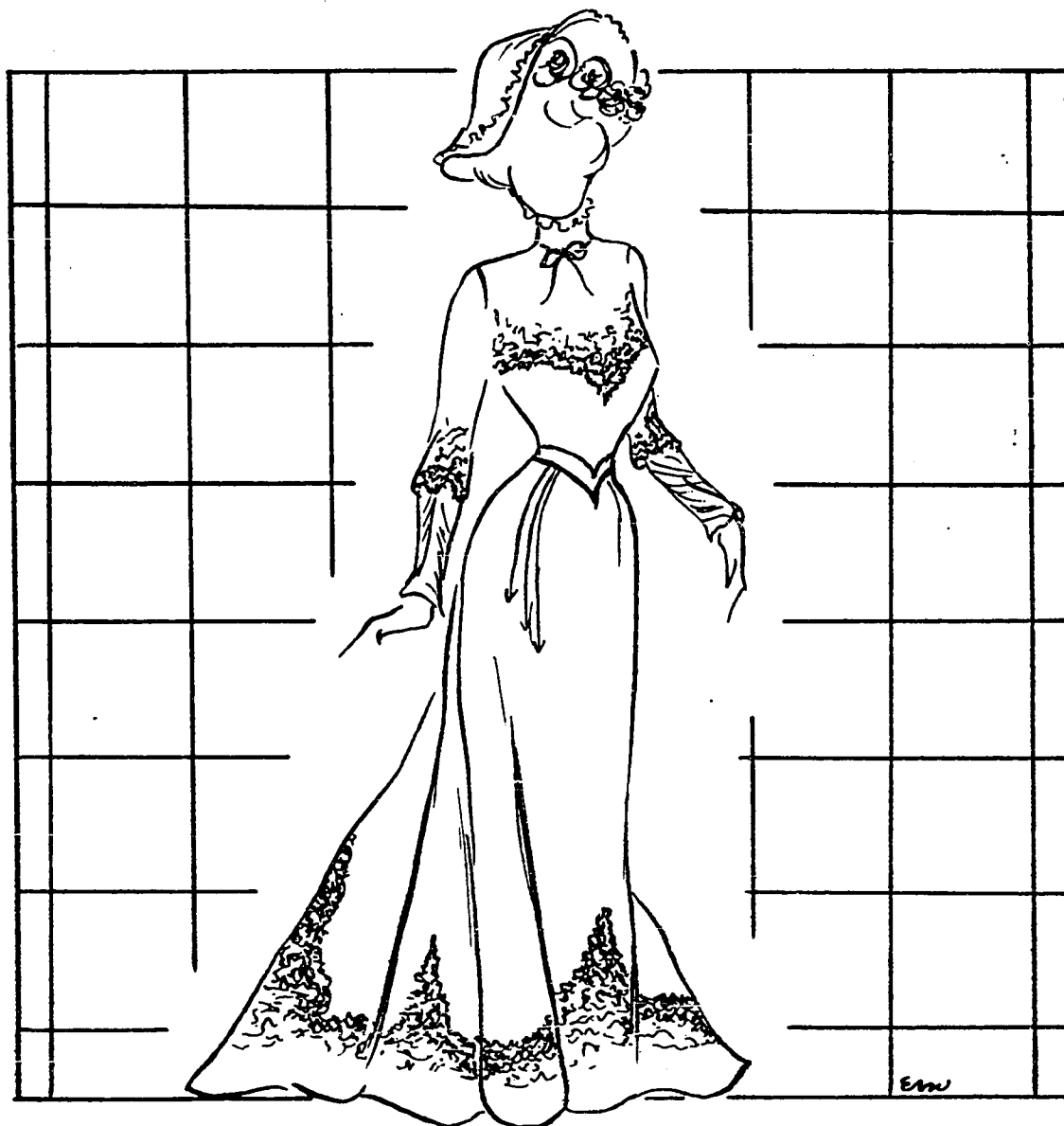


FIGURE 9

THE DRESS OF 1900

Changes in fashion after 1900 were principally a reversal of the trend which had created an extremely close-fitting style of dress. Sleeves were again made large and the bodice softened by fullness at the bust. The waistline retained its smallness, but the width of the skirt was increased by added fullness.

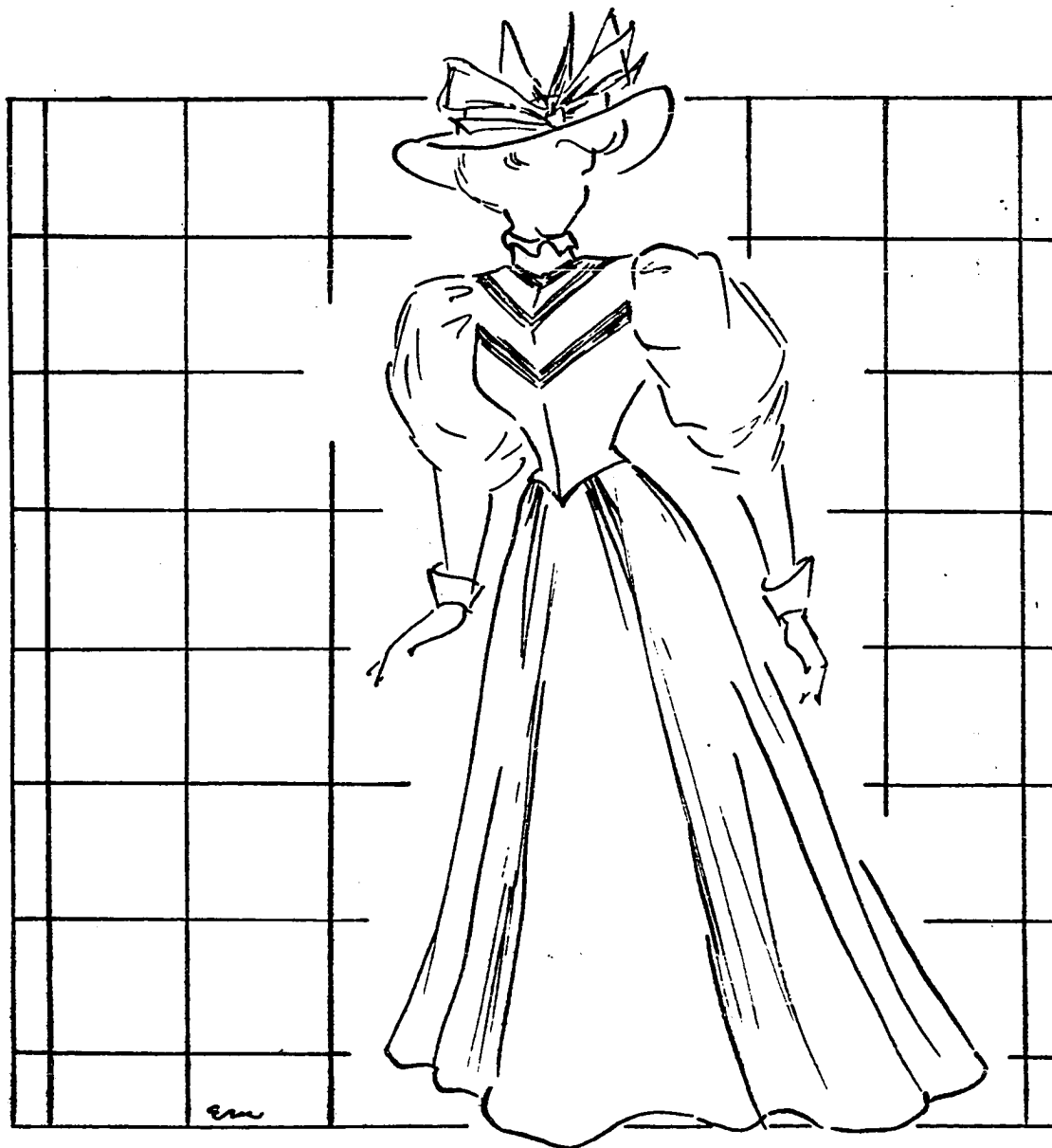
The point of maximum extension of the puffs of the sleeves and the width of the skirt was reached by 1905. The costume of that year, illustrated in Figure 10, was very similar to the dress of 1896. Just as 1896 represented the point at which the sleeves and the skirt began to be minimized, the year 1905 represented a similar point of change. After 1905 the trend of fashion was toward dress designs which again fitted the figure closely.

Additional changes pointed to an alteration in the basic silhouette after 1905. The fashionable contour was straightened at the waistline by releasing the pinched waist. A new corset with a straight front permitted a more relaxed waistline. The use of a wide belt made the upper part of the body shorter. The skirt was cut to hang straight to the floor. The curves of the feminine figure which had been revealed and emphasized by the first tubular silhouette were subtly eliminated.<sup>7</sup>

Changes in the production of fashionable dress. The increased production of clothing in the United States brought gradual changes to the fashion world. Paris continued to dominate fashion design, but

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<sup>7</sup>Fischel and Von Boehn, op. cit., pp. 111-113.



**FIGURE 10**  
**THE DRESS OF 1905**



after 1900 American fashion began to develop independently.<sup>8</sup> Wealthy Americans imported Parisian dresses and wore the products of the French designers. Many women in the United States, however, purchased ready-to-wear dresses which had been copied by workers in New York City. The typical smartly dressed American used the available fashion plates and tissue-paper patterns to make her own clothes.

The copying of imported Parisian fashions, either by the ready-to-wear industry or the home seamstresses, resulted in fashions being adapted to make them more suitable to the country in which they were to be worn. H. G. Barnett points out the inevitability of a "modification of the prototype even though the copyist makes a diligent effort to be faithful to his model."<sup>9</sup>

Fashionable women of all nations continued to purchase the products of the Parisian haute couture. The mass-production of clothing in the United States permitted more women to wear the designs of the French in the form of copies or adaptations. This created more uniformity in dress, but it also made fashionable clothing available to a greater number of women.<sup>10</sup> More Americans were able to wear the fashionable designs adapted from the French.

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<sup>8</sup>Paul McPharlin, Life and Fashion in America (New York: Hastings House, Publishers, Inc., 1946), pp. 38-39.

<sup>9</sup>H. G. Barnett, Innovation (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1953), p. 49.

<sup>10</sup>Grace Thompson, "Introduction" in Oskar Fischel and Max Von Boehn, Modes and Manners of the Nineteenth Century (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.), IV, 1-3.

The Relationship of Change in Selected Objective  
Aspects of the Social Situation  
to Fashionable Dress

Changes in the objective aspects of the social situation from 1890 to 1907 which were considered significant for this study were examined from the standpoint of determining a relationship to change in fashionable dress. Those aspects selected for observation were: technological developments, economic developments, social stratification, and the family and status of women.

Technological developments. Technological developments were especially influential in changing the social situation of the Western world during the last decade of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Changes in technology after 1890 centered around new sources of power and the use of new materials. Europeans had done much of the foundation work, and Americans utilized their basic research to create practical things. The development of electric power and motors, communication devices, internal combustion engines, motor vehicles, and the airplane belong to this period. Both European and American inventors made startling contributions to the technological development of the era.

The inventions and improvements upon previous discoveries brought accompanying changes into the lives of the people of this period. New methods of transportation, the electric tram and street

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<sup>11</sup>Merle Curti, Richard H. Shryock, Thomas Cochran, Fred Harvey Harrington, An American History (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), p. 182.

car, the bicycle, and the automobile, gave greater mobility to more individuals than ever before. Communication through wireless, the telephone, and the media of the printed word and photograph permitted greater contact among people.<sup>12</sup> The development and use of the typewriter and telephone for business purposes brought women out of the home and into offices. The invention of mechanical conveniences for the home brought greater comfort and ease of maintenance for the homemaker. The increase in facilities made possible a concentration of groups of houses. The mutual advantages which made cities more attractive places in which to live gave added impetus to a trend toward urbanization after 1890.<sup>13</sup>

The new methods of transportation were important factors in increasing the activities of women and bringing them out of the home. The electric trams and street cars, which were being utilized in Britain, America, and the European continent by 1890, became a more convenient way of traveling about the growing cities. They provided transportation for workers and recreational facilities for individuals and families. A considerable amount of credit for the increased mobility of the 1890's was due to the development of the bicycle. Invented and improved during the previous period, the bicycle became most popular during the nineties.<sup>14</sup> Interest turned from the bicycle,

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<sup>12</sup>Carlton J. H. Hayes, A Political and Cultural History of Modern Europe (shorter revised ed.; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939), II, 210.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 218-219.

<sup>14</sup>Frederick L. Allen, The Big Change (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), pp. 109-114.

however, with the invention of the automobile. The newer means of transportation became available to those who could afford it early in the twentieth century.

The use of the bicycle by women created the need for a convenient and usable costume. Enthusiastic women cyclists began to wear a bloomer-like outfit during the nineties. The very full bloomers were similar in appearance to a shortened full skirt and were quite modest. Even the ankles were covered with appropriate boots.<sup>15</sup> This was one of the first concessions women were induced to make toward a modification of their dress for greater activity.

The perils of riding at high speed on the dusty roads in open automobiles brought modifications in the clothing of women who were faced with this new situation. Protective clothing became a new necessity. Early twentieth century motorists wore tailored "dusters" and veils which enveloped them from head to toe. The few women who drove their own cars wore a visored chauffeur's cap with a veil.<sup>16</sup>

A revolution in journalism was brought on by the development of wood pulp as a basis for cheap newsprint, photography, and power presses. Women's pages in magazines and newspapers became popular as sources of news and information about housekeeping, food, and clothing. Fashions in dress were photographed and described for a widening circle of interested women. The "free pattern" included in some

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<sup>15</sup>Barton, op. cit., p. 514.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 542-543.

of the women's magazines permitted a greater number of women to make copies of the fashionable dresses of the day.<sup>17</sup>

The wide acceptance of the typewriter and the telephone in the business offices had a far-reaching effect upon the lives of women and their dress. These mechanical devices required operators. The most successful operators proved to be women. The 1890's marked the beginning of the use of women typists, stenographers, and telephone operators. Many women entered the business world, and they proved to be competent.

The employment of women in business offices had an effect upon the fashionable dress of the nineties. The impersonal and masculine business world presented a situation which demanded a modification of feminine costume. Sleeves and skirts were reduced in size and fullness. Smooth lapels, high-standing collars, and ties were borrowed from masculine dress. Adaptations of a man's shirt became the popular "shirtwaist" of the nineties. Tailored versions of suits and dresses appeared for women at this time. There was a trimness and relative simplicity in the fashions of the mid-nineties which suited the new group of white collar workers in the offices of expanding businesses. Even the high pompadour hair arrangement of the day was topped by a trim sailor-type straw hat similar to that worn by the men of the nineties.

Technological developments had even greater effects upon the situation within the homes of the period.<sup>18</sup> There were added

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<sup>17</sup>Grace Thompson, op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>18</sup>Hayes, op. cit., pp. 211-213.

conveniences such as telephones, electric lights, vacuum cleaners, electric sewing machines, and washing machines to make housekeeping less difficult. Better stoves and iceboxes were welcome conveniences in the kitchen. Food preparation was facilitated by better methods of preservation, canning, and refrigeration. A variety of furnaces brought more comfortable artificial heating. Better methods of plumbing provided bathrooms and lavatories. Not only was living more comfortable and convenient, but the homemaker also was relieved of many laborious and time-consuming duties.

Economic developments. The economic developments of the interval between 1890 and 1907 kept pace with the technological and industrial developments of the era. Stimulus to old industries and the creation of new industries resulted in vastly enlarged opportunities for the extension of financial activities. Large-scale operations promoted a trend toward the consolidation of industries almost to the point of monopoly. Fortunes were made by ingenious and sometimes unscrupulous individuals who gained control of essential industries.<sup>19</sup>

This was a period of general prosperity and well-being for most of the people of Europe and America. There were indications that the majority of the populace shared to some extent in the prosperity brought about by increased industrialization.

The fluctuating business cycles of prosperity and depression had their usual effect upon the economy of the United States. The

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<sup>19</sup>Hayes, op. cit., p.220.

difficulties encountered during business slumps favored the large corporations at the expense of the small business man. This resulted in the benefits of the boom periods being concentrated in the hands of a few financiers and industrialists. The benefits of the period were not evenly distributed.<sup>20</sup> The richest families were increasing their wealth faster than the remainder of the population. The prosperity of the nation increased the spread of differences between the economic and social levels of the social structure.

The economic prosperity which characterized this period was conducive to the creation of elegant and luxurious fashions in dress. The costumes of the very wealthy were the models for the fashions of the day. In an era of fortune building, there was considerable emphasis upon a display of wealth. There was much more evidence of taste and aesthetic appreciation than in the preceding period. The fashions of the turn of the century exhibited a great deal of charm and elegance.

The materials and decorations used for costume were especially luxurious and costly at this time. Fischel and Von Boehn wrote, "It was an epoch distinguished by great luxury, a luxury very apparent in the materials used in dress."<sup>21</sup> Extremely fragile and delicate textures, costly products of the weaver's art, were used during this period. Silk was used for dresses and for undergarments. Silk petticoats, trimmed with ruffles and flounces, rustled under the dresses

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<sup>20</sup>Arthur S. Link, American Epoch (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), p. 23.

<sup>21</sup>Fischel and Von Boehn, op. cit., p. 94.

of fashionable women. Expensive laces, embroideries, and beads were added to already expensive gowns.<sup>22</sup>

Social stratification. The social class structure of this interval between 1890 and 1907 was affected by the increased wealth and the modes of production brought about by the industrialization of the principal nations of the Western world. There was a greater tendency toward a separation of the classes economically, but class lines became less apparent and less clearly defined.

The families of the founders of fortunes attempted to reinforce their upper class position and to widen the separation between themselves and those occupying the lower economic strata. American business men became Big Businessmen with fortunes and power which made them the pivotal elite of the nation.<sup>23</sup> The fabulous "four hundred" of the society of New York gave banquets and balls which were reported in the society pages for the lower classes to read about. They lived in princely mansions and wore luxurious clothing. There was a great deal of snobbery and conspicuous waste among this American social group. The last decade of the nineteenth century witnessed the last stand against uniformity and democracy on the part of the upper classes.<sup>24</sup> The striving for distinction became less noticeable after the turn of the century.

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>23</sup>Max Lerner, America as a Civilization (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), p. 476.

<sup>24</sup>Fischel and Von Boehn, op. cit., p. 157.



More significant in the total social situation was the unobtrusive emergence of the middle class. A new group of white collar workers, many of them women, was added to the older middle class. Salesmen and sales girls, office workers, advertisers, middlemen, and the talent professions were grouped with farmers, shopkeepers, and small business men to form a larger and more important class in America.<sup>25</sup>

The separation of the lower classes was much less apparent and became less definite as the period advanced. Workers in the middle class and the lower class group were similar in their objectives. The lower classes were attracted by middle class and elite values. They preferred to be absorbed into the rest of American society rather than being set apart. Subjectively the workers thought of themselves as middle class.<sup>26</sup>

The emergence of the middle class as a more important social group in the social structure coincided with significant changes in dress. The trimly tailored costumes preferred by business and professional women became the accepted fashions for all women. Skirts and blouses, as illustrated in Figure 8, gradually replaced the elaborately draped bustle silhouette. Glynn Grylls expressed the change in fashion with the statement,

New heroines appear in fiction, and in fashion plates: the voluminous skirts, tight waists and unwieldy hats meant for carriage wear give place to the trim blue

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<sup>25</sup>Lerner, op. cit., p. 488.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 499.

serge coat and skirt and the straw sailor of the woman who has to get about in public conveyances to her job...<sup>27</sup>

The fashions of the nineties were influenced more by the working woman of the middle class than the more leisured ladies of the wealthy upper class.

The greater influence of the middle class woman upon fashion tended to blur class lines by fostering a greater degree of uniformity in dress. Women of the upper classes stressed the use of beautiful and luxurious materials which only the wealthy could afford for their dress. It may be noted that,

The more the mode set out to make all women alike, the more certain privileged circles strove to maintain their distinction.<sup>28</sup>

The luxurious and elegant costumes of the last decade of the nineteenth century were the last to emphasize the class distinctions of the social structure. There was a much greater similarity of general cut and contour in dress to be found at all class levels after the turn of the century.

The family and status of women. Changes in the family and status of women during this interval between 1890 and 1907 presented alterations in the social situation for women which stimulated changes in dress. The trends of this era were indicative of the increased freedom and greater activity of women.

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<sup>27</sup>Glynn Grylls, "Emancipation of Women," Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians (London: Sylvan Press Limited, 1949), p. 260.

<sup>28</sup>Fischel and Von Boehn, op. cit., p. 157.

This period, spanning the last of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, witnessed the beginning of the new freedom for women. It was not only the physical freedom brought about by the technology of the era, but also freedom from the dictum, "woman's place is in the home." Women began to find a place in society outside the home. Increasing numbers of women found employment outside the home, engaged in sports and recreational activities, and began to work actively in the movements working for her own achievement of equality.

Marriage and a family were still the major concerns of most women. There was an increase in the percentage of the population married during this period.<sup>29</sup> There was also an indication that women were less willing to maintain an unsatisfactory marriage. The divorce rate of 1890 showed that 5.9 per cent of each 100 marriages ended in divorce. This figure increased to 7.9 per cent in 1900, and in 1910, 8.8 per cent of each 100 marriages were dissolved.<sup>30</sup>

The trend toward urbanization brought more families into cities during this period. This brought increased conveniences to the homemaker. There was also a slight decrease in the size of the family. By 1890 the average size of the family was just under five individuals. The average size of the family in 1900 was 4.7, and the indications

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<sup>29</sup>Arnold Rose, Sociology (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 152.

<sup>30</sup>Baber, op. cit., pp. 444-446.

were toward a continuance in the decrease.<sup>31</sup>

The women of this period after 1890 were increasingly attracted to work outside the home. In that year 13.9 per cent of all women over sixteen were working. Only 4.6 per cent of these were married. The number of women working by 1900 was 20.6 per cent of all women over sixteen. The percentage of married women in this group increased to 5.6 per cent. The census of 1910 indicated that there was an increase of about one-third, or 32.9 per cent, over the previous decade in the number of women working. This group of working women included 24.3 per cent who were married. This was a greater increase than had occurred in any previous decade.<sup>32</sup>

There was an increasing amount of time spent by all members of the families of the day upon recreational activities. Families did many things together.<sup>33</sup> Tennis, golf, croquet, archery, and bicycling were the favorite sports. Even the trolley car had a recreational side when amusement parks were added to the terminals of railway lines.

Women, especially, added these sports and activities to their growing list of interests outside the home. They became enthusiastic bicyclists, and developed a reasonable amount of skill at golf and tennis.

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<sup>31</sup>Ernest L. Bogard and Donald L. Kemmerer, Economic History of the American People (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1947), p. 507.

<sup>32</sup>United States Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1949), p. 63.

<sup>33</sup>Baber, op. cit., p. 634.

The movement for the rights and freedom of women did not emerge clearly until after the beginning of this period. There had been earlier bids for the emancipation of women, but it was not until this last decade of the nineteenth century that interest began to extend to a large enough group to achieve any results. One of the reasons for the difficulties of the feminist movement was the opposition from the women themselves. It was necessary to make converts among women as well as men. The working women of the middle class became most interested in working for the recognition of equality after 1890.<sup>34</sup>

The increased freedom and greater activity of women coincided with the adoption of fashions based upon the tubular silhouette. The free flaring skirts and somewhat less restrictive bodices were much more suited to the needs of the women of this period than the costumes of the preceding decades.

The fashions of this interval between 1890 and 1907 were the first to recognize the suitability of clothing. Working women and women engaged in sports selected costumes suited to their particular purpose. The woman in business and professional life selected a trim suit or blouse and skirt. The sports enthusiast wore shorter and less hampering skirts for golf and bloomers for bicycling.<sup>35</sup> This was the beginning of specialization in dress. The fashions of this era began to stress clothing suitable for the occasion for which it was worn.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Barton, op. cit., p. 498.

<sup>36</sup>Fischel and Von Boehn, op. cit., p. 144.

The fashions of the working woman also contributed to the expansion of the "ready-to-wear" industry and the acceptance of the "ready-made" garment. The uniformity of the jacket, blouse, and skirt made the mass production of women's clothing more practical. The ready-made garment gained considerable popularity during the last years of the nineteenth century.<sup>37</sup>

The Relationship of Change in Selected Subjective  
Aspects of the Social Situation  
to Fashionable Dress

The years from 1890 to 1907 were especially marked by alterations in the subjective definitions of the socio-cultural situation of the time. There were evidences of change in many of the attitudes and values held by women of this era. Changes in the structural areas of fashionable dress and the adoption of a new silhouette coincided with changes in the social situation.

This period was dominated by the new freedom and equality accorded to women. There were new interpretations of femininity, and coquetry, romanticism, and a relaxation of prudery. This interval was characterized by extravagance and snobbery. Efforts toward reform extended to women's dress fashions as well as to many problem areas. Changes in dress which brought about the new contour of the first tubular silhouette corresponded to changes in the definition of the situation for women.

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

Freedom and Equality. Nineteenth century women began to achieve a measure of freedom and equality during the last decade of the century. Technological, industrial, and economic developments released women from the home and brought them into an environment previously occupied and completely dominated by men. Women began to encroach upon the masculine position in the business, professional, and sports world after 1890. They not only demonstrated their abilities in these areas, but they also entered into competition with men.

The definition of the situation of women in a new environment of men and encroachment upon masculine prerogatives coincided with the adaptation of mannish details of dress into fashions for women. Suits in fabrics and colors usually worn by men began to appear for women. Jacket and skirt combinations had tailored lapels and pockets similar to those of men's suits. The popular "shirtwaist" for women was an adaptation of the man's shirt. It was complete with high starched collar and four-in-hand or Windsor tie. Even hats worn by fashionable women were very similar to those of the men.<sup>38</sup>

New interests in the sports world also expressed the new freedom for women. They began to make concessions in their dress to the requirements of physical movement. Skirts were shortened to allow freedom around the ankles. The bloomer suit, quite acceptable to women who had accepted the new situation, was popularized as the appropriate costume for bicycling. This garment was the first feminine costume

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<sup>38</sup>Barton, op. cit., p. 498.

to permit the required freedom of movement for a physical activity.

True equality with men was not achieved during this period.

Women did secure some rights and privileges which brought them closer to a status of equality than previously. The movement for women's suffrage still had few adherents. The right to vote was to be reserved for the women of another era.<sup>39</sup>

Femininity and coquetry. The women of this period did not wish to relinquish their female qualities. They even attempted to emphasize their femininity through their costume and their behavior. The wasp-waist continued to accentuate feminine curves. Full skirts and massive sleeves assisted in the creation of an illusion of helplessness. Underneath even the most tailored dresses there were rustling petticoats edged with colorful ruffles. These "dust-ruffles" were not to be concealed. They were artfully displayed by manipulation of the skirts of the dresses. Coquetry was subtle, but it became more important in a competitive environment.

Romanticism. Romanticism returned to a greater importance during this period. The dichotomy of the sexes, which had developed as men became more engrossed in business affairs, continued to leave women to their own interests and resources.<sup>40</sup> Many women, especially

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<sup>39</sup>Carrie Chapman Catt, "Woman Suffrage and Politics," America Through Women's Eyes, ed. Mary Beard (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), pp. 379-380.

<sup>40</sup>Eric John Dingwall, The American Woman (New York: Rinehart & Co., Inc., 1957), pp. 73-74.



in America, occupied themselves with expressions of a romantic nature.

Clothing was one of the favorite means of the women of this era for creating an idealized aura of romance. Beautiful materials and soft pastel colors were popular for creating the desired effect. Embroideries and laces, plumes, and parasols were devices for decorating costumes which assisted in achieving an air of romance.<sup>41</sup>

Relaxation of prudery. There was a relaxation of the prudery which had dominated the nineteenth century. Even in the nineties the high neckline, the restrictive undergarments, and the long concealing skirt continued to cover the fashionable woman from head to toe. The new freedom and equality, activity in sports, and a new definition of the situation permitted the relaxation of an attitude of long endurance.

The change in attitude toward the human body coincided with a change in fashion in dress.<sup>42</sup> The tubular silhouette, which followed the contours of the feminine figure, was reflective of the relaxation of prudery. The corset strings were loosened, the neckline was lowered, and skirts were flared and sometimes shortened to permit greater freedom. The woman of this period revealed her natural curves and achieved a gracefulness of movement which had been impossible in the restrictive costumes of the preceding periods. The introduction of

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<sup>41</sup>Rose Netzorg Kerr, 100 Years of Costumes in America (Massachusetts: The Davis Press, Inc., 1951), p. 45.

<sup>42</sup>C. Willett Cunningham, Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), pp. 304-305.

the bloomer-suit for sportswear was an indication of a relaxation of the rigid discipline which had permeated English and American dress for most of the nineteenth century.

Extravagance and snobbery. Extravagance and snobbery characterized this era. Only the few were extremely wealthy, but they went to great efforts to proclaim their wealth and to distinguish themselves from the remainder of the populace. They used their clothing to portray their success in acquiring wealth and to maintain their distinction. This was the era which Thorstein Veblen blasted as exemplifying his economic theory of "conspicuous consumption." In his book, The Theory of the Leisure Class, Veblen pointed to the use of luxurious materials and dress designs which would not permit the wearer to do anything useful.<sup>43</sup> Fischel and Von Boehn commented that women of wealth used their dress as,

a last stand against uniformity and democracy, a last moment of brilliance before the oncoming masses should sweep away everything distinctive, precious and beautiful.<sup>44</sup>

Only the few could achieve the look of elegance which characterized women's fashions at the turn of the century.

Reform. This interval from 1890 to 1907 heralded a movement toward reform in many areas including the dress of women. Corsets and their tight lacings were the principal features of dress under attack

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<sup>43</sup>Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class (New York: The Modern Library, Inc., 1934), p. 167.

<sup>44</sup>Fischel and Von Boehn, op. cit., p. 157.

by the reformers. The distress of women who wore restrictive garments was the concern of physicians and health promoters. Appeals to adopt a more sensible dress had little effect until after 1890. It was not until fashion created the costume built around the skirt, blouse, and jacket that a practical and comfortable garment became popular. This costume embodied the reforms which were aimed toward developing a more suitable dress for women.<sup>45</sup>

This interval between 1890 and 1907 was an extremely significant period in the lives of women. Trends and movements which had their beginnings at a previous time gained impetus at the termination of the nineteenth century. A change in the definition of the situation coincided with the change in the basic silhouette of fashionable dress. Significant changes in attitudes brought about alterations in the interpretation of that silhouette.

The Relationship of Crises in the Social  
Situation to Fashionable Dress

This period, spanning the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, was relatively free from major disturbances. The nations of the Western world were occupied with overseas expansion and industrial development which brought them into closer contact with one another. International conflicts, however, created tension and unrest. These years were only to set the stage for a widespread crisis which was to involve the dominant group of Western countries.

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 142-143.

The European nations were occupied with internal affairs and the maintenance of a balance of power. The United States was placed in the role of impartial friend and mediator in international affairs. There was a successful avoidance of open conflict, but mounting tensions set the stage for an approaching crisis.

The United States, by 1896 the leading industrial nation in the world,<sup>46</sup> was affected chiefly by economic fluctuations. These had a more far-reaching effect upon all economic strata of the population than formerly. However, the periods of depression were relatively short, and the general level of prosperity of this era fostered favorable economic conditions in the country.

The general unrest and the economic fluctuations of the leading nations of the Western world coincided with a lack of stability in women's dress. Changes occurred more frequently in the structural areas of the sleeves and skirt during this period. A swing from an exaggeration to a minimization of the size of the sleeve occurred twice during this period. The skirt was also subjected to changes in fullness and width at the bottom. These alterations occurred at a point of extreme exaggeration rather than in correspondence to crises. They were made within the basic silhouette and did not show a specific correspondence to disruptive stimuli. The frequency of change in fashion coincided with the general conditions of unrest and tension of the period.

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<sup>46</sup>Curti, et al., op. cit., p. 181.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE SECOND TUBULAR SILHOUETTE IN DRESS TO THE SOCIAL SITUATION FROM 1908 TO 1929

This chapter is devoted to a consideration of changes in fashion and changes in the social situation during the time interval between 1908 and 1929. The delineation of this period is based upon a detectable variation in the basic form of dress for women after 1908. The continuation of the use of the tubular silhouette, of which the second version was a significant alteration, was indicative of the continuity of fashion with the preceding period. Correspondingly, many of the changes in the social situation were variations and developments of trends which had already been set in motion before 1908.

#### Fashionable Dress From 1908 to 1929

Fashionable dress of the second version of the tubular silhouette clothed the natural contours of the feminine figure in a manner which created a slim tubular shape. The restricted waistline of the earlier periods was relaxed and varied in placement. The skirt was cut straight and narrow or in flares which fell close to the figure. The result was a pencil-like, slender form with little recognition of feminine curves.

Changes in design during this period of the second tubular silhouette were principally at the waistline and in the skirt. The waistline was widened and moved from its normal position. The belt was placed higher or lower than the usual waistline position. Sometimes it was discarded altogether. The skirt was varied in width and length. The skirt width ranged from a narrow sheath to a wide flaring version. The length was fluctuated from the instep to the knees. The fashions of this period were subjected to greater extremes of interpretation of the structural lines of dress design than were to be found in any other time interval included in this study.

The dress of 1910. Changes in fashion were much more frequent after 1908. The new version of the tubular silhouette appeared about that time to mark a point of change from the previous contour of the first tubular silhouette. The second tubular silhouette, illustrated in Figure 11, was well established by 1910. Figure 11 illustrates a costume which is representative of the style of dress based upon the second version of the tubular silhouette. The long sheath design created the illusion of a tall tubular shape with a minimization of the curves of the waistline and bustline. The skirt was extremely narrow, and it had been shortened enough to reveal the pointed toes of high-heeled shoes.



FIGURE 11  
THE DRESS OF 1910

The dress of 1914. After the first decade of the twentieth century, there was an increase in the number and frequency of changes in the skirt treatments of fashionable dress. The already narrow skirts became even more narrow, especially at the ankles. A "hobble" skirt was achieved by confining the skirt by means of a narrow band just above the ankles. An effect of extreme narrowness at the base of the silhouette was accomplished by the "peg-top" skirt. This design was based upon exaggerated fullness at the hipline above extreme narrowness at the ankles. Figure 12 illustrates the rather extreme interpretation of fashion in dress which was worn in 1914. This costume also utilizes a raised waistline and a very low neckline.<sup>1</sup> These extremes in dress design did not last very long. However, they represent a point of exaggeration in the interpretation of the slender tubular silhouette which was popular for a short time.

The dress of 1916. The fashions of 1916 indicated another interpretation of the shape and cut of the skirt. A shorter and wider skirt was used with a soft blouse. The waistline was raised by means of a wider belt, and the skirt fell soft and full from the waistline.

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<sup>1</sup>Lucy Barton, Historic Costume for the Stage (Boston: Walter H. Baker Co., 1935), p. 544.





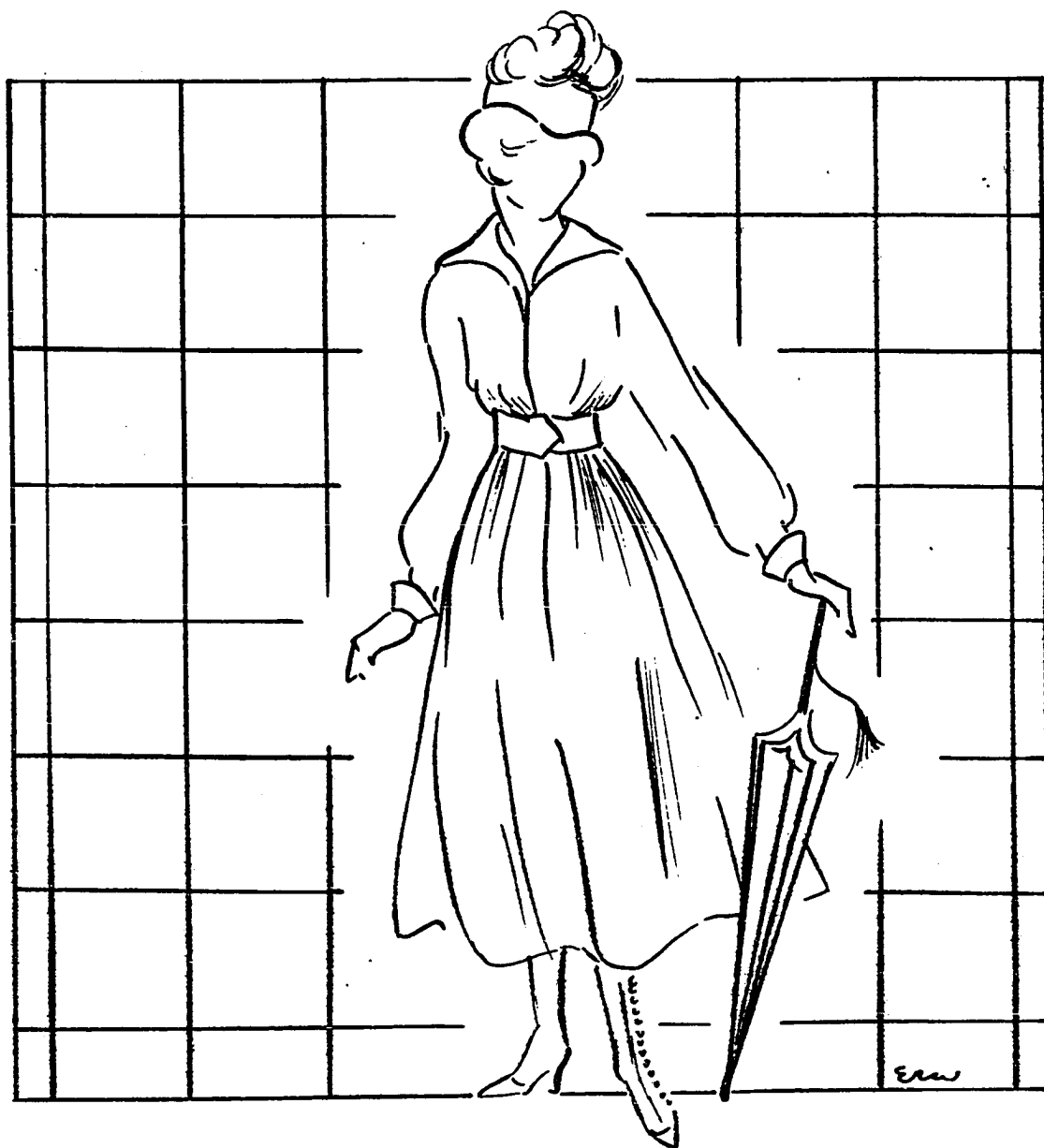
**FIGURE 12**  
**THE DRESS OF 1914**

The dress of 1916 is illustrated in Figure 13. This sketch shows a costume with the shorter and wider skirt. The tubular effect was modified, but the silhouette followed the basic contour of the basic form. The variation in the skirt resulted in a costume more casual and comfortable than the preceding version of the narrow skirt.

The dress of 1924. The dress of 1924 reflected the changes in the skirt and waistline which occurred after 1916. Skirts became longer and narrower within those few years. The waistline was dropped and the length of the blouse was increased. The belt was moved lower and lower upon the figure until it came to rest at the hipline.

The tubular silhouette of this era was achieved largely by the use of undergarments which suppressed the contours of the feminine figure. Women also held their bodies in a way which minimized the shape of the bust and hips. The so-called "debutante slouch" was a deliberate effort to make the figure as straight and curveless as possible.

The arrangement of the hair and the application of make-up had become an important part of fashionable dress by 1920. Hair was waved and cut. Make-up was copied from the movie queens, but most women were not skilled in its application. The emphasis upon



**FIGURE 13**  
**THE DRESS OF 1916**

cosmetics and grooming increased during the twenties.

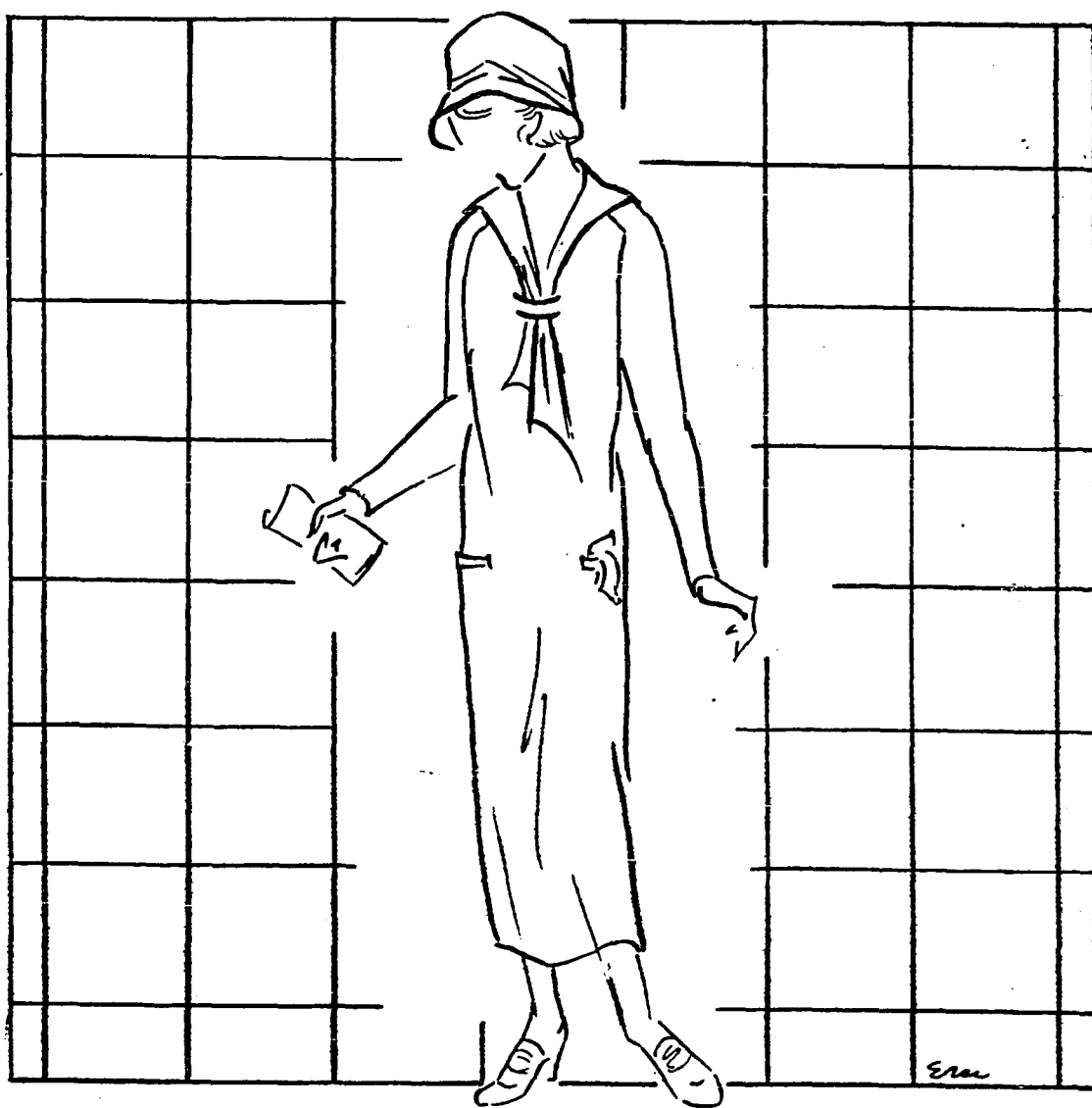
The dress of 1924 is illustrated in Figure 14. This sketch shows a typical one-piece dress of the mid-twenties. This straight-hanging garment of the chemise type minimized the contours of the figure. The belt, which had been placed lower and lower upon the body, was discarded altogether. The skirt was lengthened to just above the ankles. This was an extreme point in the length of the skirt and the emphasis upon the long tubular effect achieved by the straight skirt.

The dress of 1928. The extremely straight long skirt worn by fashionable women was shortened after reaching a low point in 1924. A reversal in the trend toward added length resulted in a shorter skirt. Women's figures were still straightened by the elimination of the waistline. Dresses hung from the shoulder to the hem with only a suggestion of a break at the hipline. The long tubular effect was emphasized by the minimization of the normal curves of the figure.

This was the era of the flat, boyish figure. Undergarments and dress designs flattened the bustline and eliminated the curves of the feminine figure. Every means for achieving the idealized boyish figure was utilized in the dress of the twenties.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Rose Netzorg Kerr, 100 Years of Costumes in America (Massachusetts: The Davis Press, Inc., 1951), pp. 54-55.



**FIGURE 14**  
**THE DRESS OF 1924**

It was after 1924 that the most startling change in skirt length took place. The skirt was raised steadily until it was barely knee length in 1928. The suggestion of a waistline reappeared. The bustline was completely ignored and made as flat as possible. Figure 15 illustrates the rather incongruous proportions created by the fashion designs of 1928. The length of the blouse was less than the length of the skirt. The short skirt revealed a length of leg which had never before appeared in feminine dress.

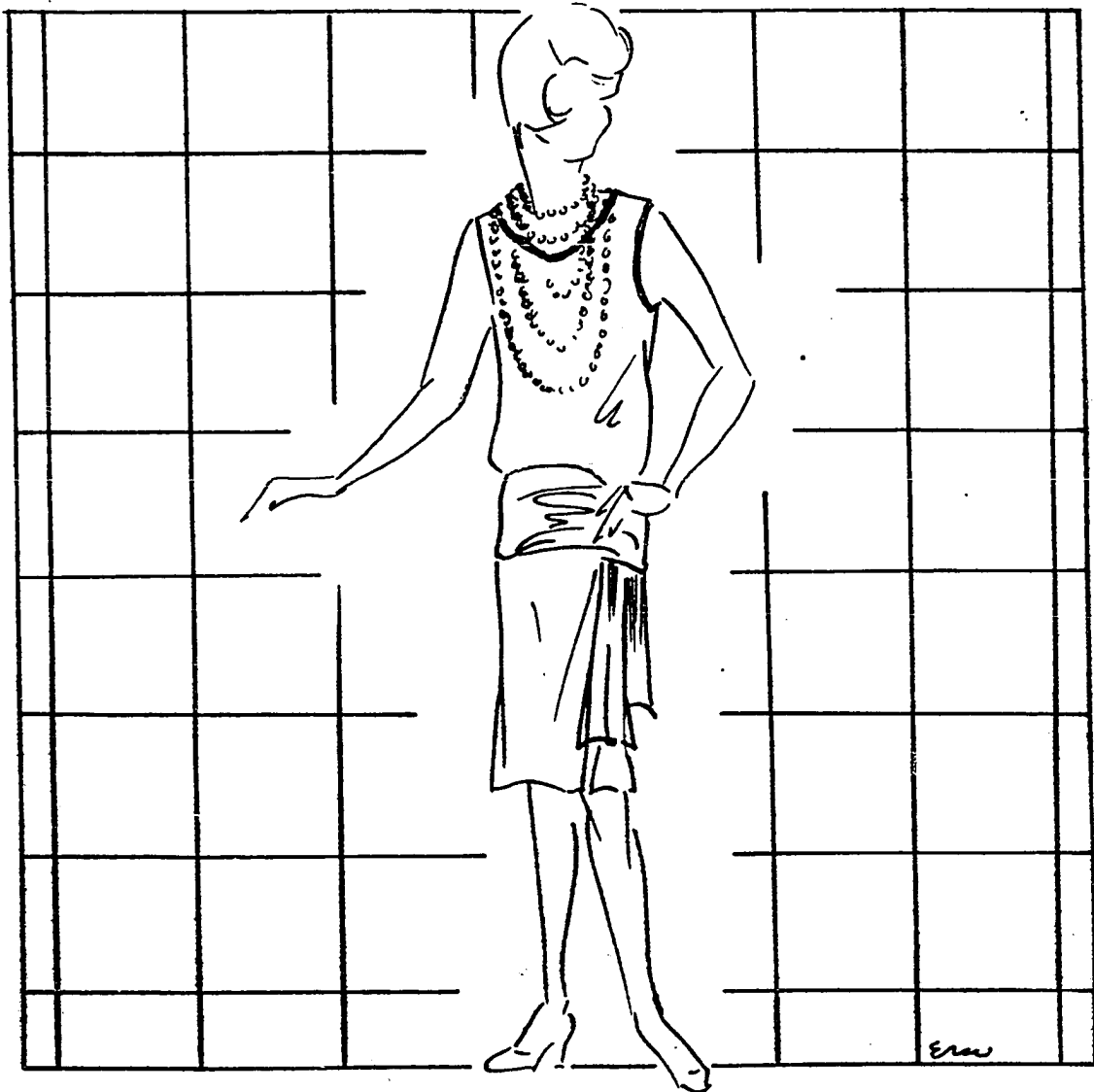
Clothing in the twenties became more casual and more comfortable. Simple lines and a more practical use of fabrics minimized the care of clothing. There was less restriction and much more freedom in the clothes of this period than in previous eras. There was a development of more concern with grooming and keeping clothes fresh, pressed, and clean during the latter part of the twenties.<sup>3</sup>

The costume of 1928 represented the point of greatest exaggeration of the short skirt and placement of the waistline. This extreme interpretation was modified shortly after 1928. The alterations led to a new version of the tubular silhouette.

The source of fashionable dress. The source of fashionable dress during the nineteenth century had been the French houses of fashion. The American women of this period were still looking to Paris for their inspiration in dress design. The increase in mass production in the United States, however, was having an effect upon

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<sup>3</sup>Eric John Dingwall, The American Woman (New York: Rinehart & Co., Inc., 1957), p. 173.



**FIGURE 15**  
**THE DRESS OF 1928**

the designers of Paris during this early part of the twentieth century. The French designers began to take into consideration the modifications which American women were making in the clothes which were produced in France. The work of French designers began to reflect the selections made by American women.

The influence of American taste became more extensive during this period. Helen Woodward, from her experience in working in advertising in New York at this time, expressed her opinion that, "No fashion can be introduced successfully in the United States by the haute couture of Paris unless the American women want it."<sup>4</sup> She pointed out that the American woman makes selections from the fashions created by the designers. Miss Woodward wrote, "while the Paris dressmaker does the original thinking, the American woman does the deciding. And the pressure of her deciding is beginning to change French work."<sup>5</sup>

The Relationship of Change in Selected Objective  
Aspects of the Social Situation  
to Fashionable Dress

The objective aspects of the social structure selected for study- technological developments, economic developments, social

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<sup>4</sup>Helen Woodward, "Through Many Windows," America Through Women's Eyes, ed. Mary Beard (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), p. 420.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 421.



stratification, and the family and status of women - were examined for a determination of the relationship of change in these aspects to change in fashionable dress.

Technological developments. The technological developments of the interval between 1908 and 1929 made possible a steadily increasing volume of production in the basic industries. Technological changes caused a gain in productivity of 40 per cent in manufacturing and 26 per cent in agriculture.<sup>6</sup> Fewer workers could produce a larger volume of goods to make a richer material life for many more people during this period.

Technological developments also led to the creation of new industries. New goods were produced and distributed to the consumer. New devices for transportation and communication were developed and proved practical during this early portion of the twentieth century. New comforts and conveniences changed the home life of many families. Women, especially, were the beneficiaries of the new technology.

The production of textiles, one of the well-established industries, was affected during this period by technological change. The volume of production was greatly increased before 1920, but changes in demand prompted a decline in the quantities produced.<sup>7</sup> It was during the 1920's that the production of "artificial silk" or

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<sup>6</sup>Arthur S. Link, American Epoch (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), p. 307.

<sup>7</sup>Merle Curti, Richard H. Shryock, Thomas C. Cochran, and Fred Harvey Harrington, An American History (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), II, p. 392.

rayon became significant.<sup>8</sup> It offered a first substitute for the more expensive silk fiber.

The textile industry furnished the new materials which were suited to the requirements of fashionable dress. The production of silk and rayon crepes, which would cling to the figure, were greatly responsible for the tubular silhouette. Elaborate and elegant fabrics were created for use in creating distinctions between dresses for special occasions. The shorter dresses which revealed the legs might never have become so popular had not the textile industry furnished knitted silk and rayon hose.

The automobile industry was one of the most important technological developments of this period. The use of motor cars and trucks developed very rapidly in European countries and the United States. The increase in motor transportation added greatly to the mobility of the masses, especially in the United States.

The tremendous influence of the automobile upon this period is reflected in a small way upon the clothing of women. In the early days of the motor car, women wore protective clothing over their dress.<sup>9</sup> Improvements in automobile design removed the necessity for specialized clothing. Women could safely wear their usual costumes while riding in the later automobiles. Clothing which permitted the increased mobility and freedom of women coincided with a

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<sup>8</sup>Carlton J. H. Hayes, A Political and Cultural History of Modern Europe (shorter revised ed.; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939), II, p. 813.

<sup>9</sup>Barton, op. cit., p. 542.

greater availability of motor transportation.

Technological developments continued to improve equipment and conveniences for the home. The use of electricity greatly stimulated the use of household appliances. These were principally standard items such as irons, washing machines and vacuum cleaners. The homemaker's duties were being steadily lightened by the technological improvements of the day.<sup>10</sup>

The radio was one of the new technological devices which went into extensive production during this period. The first permanent radio station was put into operation in 1920. The nation-wide broadcasting service was inaugurated by 1924.<sup>11</sup> Radio became a new element in advertising, recreation, and amusement during the twenties.

The rapid development of the motion picture industry belongs to this period. The first one-reel movies were shown for a nickel in 1905. By 1910 great improvements in production and distribution had been made. The movies were one of the most popular forms of entertainment during the twenties. Every small town in America had its movie house, and larger cities had several ornate theatres. Continuous work toward improvement of techniques brought sound and color to the movies toward the end of this period.<sup>12</sup>

Motion pictures had a great impact upon the lives of the women of this period. The movies were a form of entertainment and recreation

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<sup>10</sup>Frederick L. Allen, The Big Change (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), p. 119.

<sup>11</sup>Link. op. cit., p. 310.

<sup>12</sup>Curti, et al., op. cit., p. 487.

for an increasing number of the women who were being released from total absorption in household duties. Motion pictures portrayed new standards of appearance and conduct. The opportunity to see beautiful, well-mannered, and luxuriously clothed women was provided for every small town girl. The movie star became the ideal and the model for imitation. According to Eric J. Dingwall, "The main effect of the movies was to standardize their behavior as it standardized the cut of their hair and the style of their dress."<sup>13</sup> The cinema was the source of ideas about manners, morals, clothing, and conduct at this time.

Economic developments. The economic situation of the Western world during this period from 1908 to 1929 reflected the interrelationship of the nations which had developed during the early years of the twentieth century. The industrialization of European nations and the United States had created a general level of prosperity in which most of the countries had a share. The building of an export market and foreign trade created an economic interdependence among the nations. Crises of a political and economic nature assumed broader proportions than ever before.

The economic trends of the period from 1908 to 1929 proceeded along the lines which had been laid down in the previous decades. However, World War I interrupted this trend. The economy was greatly stimulated by the demands of war and increased production during the

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<sup>13</sup>Dingwall, op. cit., p. 140.

war years of 1914 to 1918. The cessation of hostilities and a decrease in need created a period of readjustment. It was a difficult economic period for many groups of a working population. An economic upswing in the 1920's brought prosperity again. Unwise economic practices, fostered by the seemingly unlimited prosperity, led to a collapse of the world economy in 1929.<sup>14</sup>

The general level of economic prosperity which characterized this period was not shared by most of the lower economic levels of society. The unequal distribution of the gains from production permitted the wealthiest families of the United States to acquire a much greater proportion of the national income than their numbers warranted. There were widening differences in income during the latter part of this period which created increasing dissatisfaction with the economic situation.<sup>15</sup>

Women's dress fashions of this era did not exploit the prosperity of the times. The general high level of economic achievement for more people tended to minimize differences in income. The extremely wealthy distinguished themselves through their choice of materials for clothing and their attention to personal grooming.<sup>16</sup> The same cut and contour in dress was worn by women of all economic levels.

The points of economic stress tended to coincide with points of extreme exaggeration in dress during this period. The economic

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<sup>14</sup>Hayes, op. cit., p. 658.

<sup>15</sup>Link, op. cit., p. 296.

<sup>16</sup>Dingwall, op. cit., p. 173.

instability precipitated by the European mobilization of armed forces in 1914 coincided with the extreme hobble and peg-top versions of the skirt. The first shortening of the skirt during this use of the tubular silhouette was done in 1916. This was just before the United States entered the war. Economically, this was a prosperous period which had been stimulated by war-time demands. The unsettlement of the early 1920's was noticeable in the extreme interpretation of the tubular silhouette in fashion, shown in Figure 14. This exaggerated interpretation of women's dress, incorporating the very short skirt and displaced waistline, was fashionable during the wildly prosperous but economically insecure period just preceding the stock market crash of 1929. The instability of the economic situation of this period corresponded somewhat to fluctuations in the interpretations of the fashionable tubular silhouette.

Social stratification. The social class structure of the early part of this period continued to be dominated by wealthy businessmen and financiers. The elite of the nation were those who were most successful in acquiring wealth and power. American new rich turned to the Old World for an acquisition of prestige. They traveled in Europe and brought back expensive and beautiful things. Some even acquired titled husbands for their daughters. By 1910 some five hundred American heiresses had married members of the European nobility.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Curti, et al., op. cit., pp. 220-221.

More significant in the American social structure was the increase in numbers and importance of the new middle class. This group was becoming larger with the industrial development of the country. A new managerial class and a white collar class increased in numbers and influence, since the need for workers in business and industry increased.

There was less apparent distinction between social groups during this period. The increase in the general level of prosperity, especially after the war, tended to blur differences between classes. More middle class and working class persons could afford the comforts and conveniences which the technology of the nation was producing. Automobiles, radios, and ready-made clothing were becoming a part of the mode of living of an increasingly larger group of Americans.

The tendency toward a blurring of class differences, which the acquisition of goods and products made possible, was accompanied by efforts on the part of the elite group to maintain some measure of distinction. During the twenties business leaders were drawn more from the families of established upper class groups than previously.<sup>18</sup> The apparent looseness of the American class structure was not as real as it might appear.

Efforts toward a maintenance of class distinction were extended to the selection and wearing of clothing. The trend toward a minimization of social differences corresponded to an increasing

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<sup>18</sup>Max Lerner, America As A Civilization (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), p. 471.

rapidity of change in fashionable dress. Variations in skirt length, placement of the waistline, and other structural features of dress design became almost seasonal. These rapid changes in fashion could be followed closely only by those with the time and the money for such attention to their wardrobes. The use of elaborate and expensive materials for dress also identified the leisure and wealthy classes.

The middle class also sought some distinction through their wearing apparel. They wore the "white collar" which became synonymous with their social level. The middle class also identified themselves by wearing street clothes to their jobs.<sup>19</sup> Standardization and the mass production of fashionable dress eliminated much of the class differences in dress, but there were still marks of identification associated with social stratification.

The family and status of women. There were significant changes in the family and the status of women during this period from 1908 to 1929. The American family reflected the trends of urbanization and industrialization which characterized the early twentieth century. The movement from the farms weakened the traditional family patterns. A change from the Gemeinschaft to the Gesellschaft family type was quite marked at this time.

Statistics show that during this period a larger proportion of the population was married, a larger number of divorces granted,

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<sup>19</sup>C. Wright Mills, White Collar (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 241.



and families were smaller. In 1915 the United States took the lead in the divorce rate and has remained there ever since.<sup>20</sup> The birth rate dropped from 25.1 per 1,000 in 1915 to 18.9 per 1,000 in 1930.<sup>21</sup>

The declining birth rate was of great concern, but perhaps of even greater concern was the birth control movement. This was indicative of women having a choice in the number and spacing of their children which they had not had before. The first clinic for dispensing information was opened in New York City in 1917. The whole movement was opposed by many forces, and there have been many mixed feelings about it.<sup>22</sup>

Members of the family spent more time away from the home during this period. Schools took more and more of the educational responsibilities of the home. Commercialized leisure-time activities multiplied, and recreation activities increased away from home. Processed foods and commercialized services brought about a decline in canning, baking, laundering, sewing, and dressmaking in the home. Even children were cared for by an increasing number of nursery schools.<sup>23</sup>

The member of the family most affected by these changes was the homemaker. The housewife found herself the possessor of more

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<sup>20</sup>Ray E. Baber, Marriage and the Family (2nd ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1953), p. 444.

<sup>21</sup>Link, op. cit., p. 296.

<sup>22</sup>Baber, op. cit., p. 546.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

free time than ever before. This new-found time went to various activities. Many women spent it at the country club, the movies, and bridge luncheons. Others tried civic responsibilities. A large group of women found jobs. More and more women, many of them married, found jobs in business offices, shops and stores, and in professional activities. By the middle twenties many women were trying to manage successfully the demands of a job and marriage.

The release of women from the home had several rather drastic consequences for the families of this era. Their ability to secure employment outside the home gave women not only economic security, but also an enhanced sense of freedom and power. There was increased influence of the women in the family. There was an undermining of the old father-centered household. There was greater concern for the children in the home, but there was also a decrease in the number of children in the family.

Other consequences of the increased freedom for women centered in an intensification of efforts for what was known as "women's rights." Feminists deplored the double standard in morals. The attitude toward divorce shifted enough that women could demand clearly established property rights and the custody of children in divorce settlements.<sup>24</sup>

Demonstrations of the capabilities of women in industry, especially during the war, emphasized the absurdity of denying women the vote.<sup>25</sup> This coupled with the special emphasis put upon representative government and the guarantee of individual liberty prevalent

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<sup>24</sup>Curti, et al., op. cit., p. 224.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

in the post-war world led to the full suffrage of women. In 1920 a constitutional amendment providing women's suffrage was ratified in the United States.<sup>26</sup>

The increased amount of time women spent at a job or social activities away from the home prompted a much greater emphasis upon costumes appropriate for the occasion and the time of day when they were worn. Women needed different types of clothing for their extending range of interests. The fashions of the day provided a more extensive variety of types of clothing than could be found in the preceding periods.

The achievement of greater freedom and release from many of the restraints imposed upon women by men and society coincided with the use of the second version of the tubular silhouette. This tubular form removed the restrictions of the previous periods. The clothing of this period not only permitted greater physical freedom, but it also expressed the sense of liberation which characterized this era. The changed status of women corresponded with these changes in fashionable dress.

The Relationship of Change in Selected Subjective  
Aspects of the Social Situation  
to Fashionable Dress

Changes in attitudes and in the definition of the situation for women during this interval between 1908 and 1929 were greater and had, perhaps, greater influence upon the behavior and dress of women

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<sup>26</sup>Hayes, op. cit., p. 657.

than the objective aspects of the social situation. The long-sought goals of freedom and equality for women became actualities. Their achievement presented a situation to the women of the times for which they had few guides. Their assessment of the situation was marked by a lack of restraint and a determination to show that women could be equal to men in almost every respect. Women's behavior and their dress were indicative of the negation of their femininity, their restlessness and disillusionment, and their relaxation of moral standards which accompanied their emancipation.

Freedom and equality. The women of this period were faced with a situation dominated by the freedom and equality for which some had worked and almost all accepted. Freedom and equality at this time meant: release from many of the confining and time-consuming household duties, the opportunity to engage in either employment or social activities outside the home, the opportunity to attain economic independence, the achievement of legal rights and privileges, the choice of being married or unmarried, greater sexual freedom, the opportunity to vote, and even to hold political office.

The attainment of these new freedoms corresponded to the new physical freedoms which developed in fashionable dress. The introduction of the second version of the tubular silhouette marked the beginning of a relaxation of the restrictions of the fashionable garments worn by women in the previous periods. The corset strings were loosened enough to permit a wider waistline at the beginning of this period.<sup>27</sup> Dresses became more comfortable with the use of the one-piece garment which eliminated the waistline altogether in the early

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<sup>27</sup>Barton, op. cit., p. 531.

twenties.<sup>28</sup> Other structural lines of dress design were altered to permit greater freedom. The neckline was lowered, sleeves were removed, and the skirts shortened to the knees during the latter part of this period.

Negation of femininity. The definition of the situation which embodied a strident insistence upon freedom and equality with the masculine members of society brought about a negation of the femininity of women. Women attempted to minimize the qualities which characterized their femaleness. This was a change from the previous attempts to emphasize qualities which would make women attractive to men.

Women selected garments and promoted fashions which minimized and even disguised their feminine contours. The pinched waist and restrictive corseting were abandoned. The new pencil-slim silhouette was straight up and down. Curves were flattened out as much as possible. The silhouette became flatter, straighter, and as close to masculine proportions as the female figure would permit. The boyish figure became the ideal. Even the hair was cut short in a style called the "boyish bob." Women seemed to want not only the status of men, but also to achieve a negation of their own femininity.

The flamboyant use of make-up, introduced after the war, was more an act of defiance than an attempt to enhance feminine charms. Accompanying the short boyish hair cut, "the rouge spot on the cheek, and the bold slash of dark red lipstick on the mouth were the signs of emancipation."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Agnes Brooks Young, Recurring Cycles of Fashion (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), pp. 123-124.

<sup>29</sup>Catherine Brewster, "U. S. Cosmetics Birth Reviewed," The New Orleans, La. Times Picayune, January 24, 1961, p. 3.

Restlessness and disillusionment. This was a period characterized by restlessness and disillusionment. The increase in speed, fast automobiles, and airplanes created a growing restlessness which was transferred to other aspects of the social situation. The increasing pressures of living in a rapidly changing world stimulated a more rapid sequence of changes in fashion. A desire for excitement and distraction brought always, "some new fashion, some new color, no matter whether it is beautiful and becoming, or distractingly ugly."<sup>30</sup> The constantly changing fashions seemed to correspond to the growing restlessness of the age.<sup>31</sup>

Disillusionment, especially after the war, seemed to correspond with the abandonment of the traditions of the past. Disillusionment with the economic structure, which permitted only the few to have and enjoy the products of technology and industry, disillusionment with religion and Christian principles, and disillusionment with the results of the war all contributed to a willingness to try anything new. Fashions in dress were indicative of this attitude through the use of extreme and radical departures from traditional forms of dress.<sup>32</sup>

Relaxation of moral standards. The abandonment of traditional forms extended to a relaxation of the moral standards of conduct. Women began to imitate men during this period in their efforts to reinforce their equality. They began to drink and smoke. They flaunted the rules governing sexual relationships. Women attempted to express

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<sup>30</sup>Carrie Hall, From Hoopskirts to Nudity (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1938), p. 108.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>32</sup>Hayes, op. cit., pp. 111-112.

the completeness of their freedom by rejecting all restrictions upon their activities.<sup>33</sup>

This attitude toward moral standards corresponded with fashions in dress which were unrestrictive. Corsets and tightly fitted garments were discarded for loosely fitted dresses. Necklines were lowered and sleeves were removed. Skirts were shortened, gradually at first, to reveal the legs. The average skirt length was six inches from the floor in 1917, and by 1927 it was at the knees. These alterations in dress design were not as much an attempt to show the feminine body as a demonstration of a lack of restraint.<sup>34</sup> The complete abandonment of restrictions in manners, morals, and sex resulted in fashions which lacked the modesty and femininity which had characterized fashionable dress previous to this period.

The Relationship of Crises in the Social Situation  
to Fashionable Dress

This portion of the twentieth century set the stage for the binding together of all of the nations of the Western world into a complicated relationship built upon outlying possessions and an international system of trade. Increasing tensions, generated by the difficulties of managing this delicately balanced relationship, were detectable as early as 1908. It was only a short time until the nations were involved in a conflict of world-wide proportions.

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<sup>33</sup>Link, op. cit., pp. 319-320.

<sup>34</sup>Kerr, op. cit., p. 56.

The Great War was touched off by a relatively minor incident on June 28, 1914.<sup>35</sup> Most of the nations of Europe were quickly involved, but the United States maintained neutrality until 1917. On April 6, 1917, the United States became an active belligerent. The German surrender brought the war to a close on November 11, 1918. The immediate crisis had ended, but the effects of this World War were far-reaching.

This war, as is characteristic of all such conflicts, created significant disturbances in many aspects of the social situation. Sweeping changes in the objective and subjective aspects of the social situation during this entire period may be ascribed to the effect of new stimuli and new conditions fostered by the Great War.

Changes in dress fashions corresponded to significant points in the development of this crisis. The dress of 1914, the beginning year of the war, was an extreme interpretation of the second tubular silhouette. The peg-top skirt, illustrated in Figure 12, was at the height of its popularity and one of the more radical departures from the usual silhouette. The change to a shorter flared skirt coincided with the years just preceding the entrance of the United States into the war. Longer skirts and a straight cut from shoulder to hem became the fashion at the time of the termination of the war. The uncertainty and insecurity which accompanied the war was matched by an instability in dress fashions. Frequent changes in dress were indicative of the disturbance created by the crisis.

Economic fluctuations following the war created further disturbances.<sup>36</sup> Readjustments necessitated by a return to peace brought

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<sup>35</sup>Hayes, op. cit., p. 566.

<sup>36</sup>Curti, et al., op. cit., pp. 376-381.



the usual cycles of prosperity and depression. Quickly rising prices in 1919 led to economic stress in the early twenties. However, a return to prosperity had been accomplished by 1923. The benefits of the good times of this era were more evenly distributed than formerly. They were just as unsettling to the social situation as the war. This widespread but unstable economic prosperity came to an end with the New York stock market crash in 1929.

Rapid changes in dress corresponded to the economic fluctuations of the decade following the war. Variations in skirt lengths and the placement of the waistline were used to create a constant stream of new fashions. The skirt length was started on its upward trend at the same time there was an upward surge in prosperity. The skirt was shortened to the knees at the peak of good times. It remained at this extreme point until the financial crash of 1929. A period of wild speculation and economic instability at the end of the twenties corresponded to the use of an extremely short skirt in fashionable dress.

The disturbances of this period, brought about by major crises in the social situation, corresponded with an increased number of changes in fashion in dress. There was also a noticeable tendency to utilize an extreme interpretation in dress design during this turbulent period.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE THIRD TUBULAR SILHOUETTE IN DRESS TO THE SOCIAL SITUATION FROM 1930 TO 1950

This chapter, a consideration of fashion and social change during the time interval between 1930 and 1950, is the final period included in this study. These two decades were dominated by the economic depression of the 1930's and the Second World War of the forties. The effects of these crises were evident in almost all aspects of the social situation of this period. The financial crash which precipitated the depression coincided with a major change in the silhouette of fashionable dress. Changes in the objective and subjective aspects of the social situation have been examined for a determination of their relationship to this third tubular silhouette in dress.

#### Fashionable Dress from 1930 to 1950

Fashionable dress of the third version of the tubular silhouette was based upon the natural contours of the feminine figure. The slim vertical shape of the human body was maintained, but feminine characteristics were enhanced. The structural lines of dress design were placed at the normal positions on the body. The dress designs

which utilized the third tubular silhouette harmonized more with the figure underneath the dress.

Dress designs were altered in many ways to create the figure proportions idealized by the women of this era. Fashionable dress increasingly emphasized the feminine contours of the body through the use of soft clinging fabrics and curving lines.<sup>1</sup> The tubular effect was accentuated by raising the waistline and lengthening the skirt. This made the body appear taller and longer-legged. The formerly drooping shoulders were straightened, and women stood more erect. Padded extensions and puffed sleeves assisted in creating a broad shoulder line. Increased mass in the upper part of the silhouette made the waistline appear smaller without actually restricting it. Variations in the skirt width and length became important details of fashion change during this period.

The dress of 1933. Changes in fashion during the first years of the 1930's were sufficient to create a costume quite different from that of the late twenties.<sup>2</sup> Figure 16 illustrates a typical dress of 1933. This sketch shows the use of the narrow skirt which had been lengthened to a point below the calf of the leg. The waistline in this dress was at the normal position and was of normal size. There was an indication of the new shoulder line. Padding had been used to make the shoulders wider, and the armscye was deeper.

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<sup>1</sup>Rose Netzorg Kerr, 100 Years of Costumes in America (Massachusetts: The Davis Press, Inc., 1951), p. 58.

<sup>2</sup>R. Turner Wilcox, The Mode in Costume (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), p. 380.

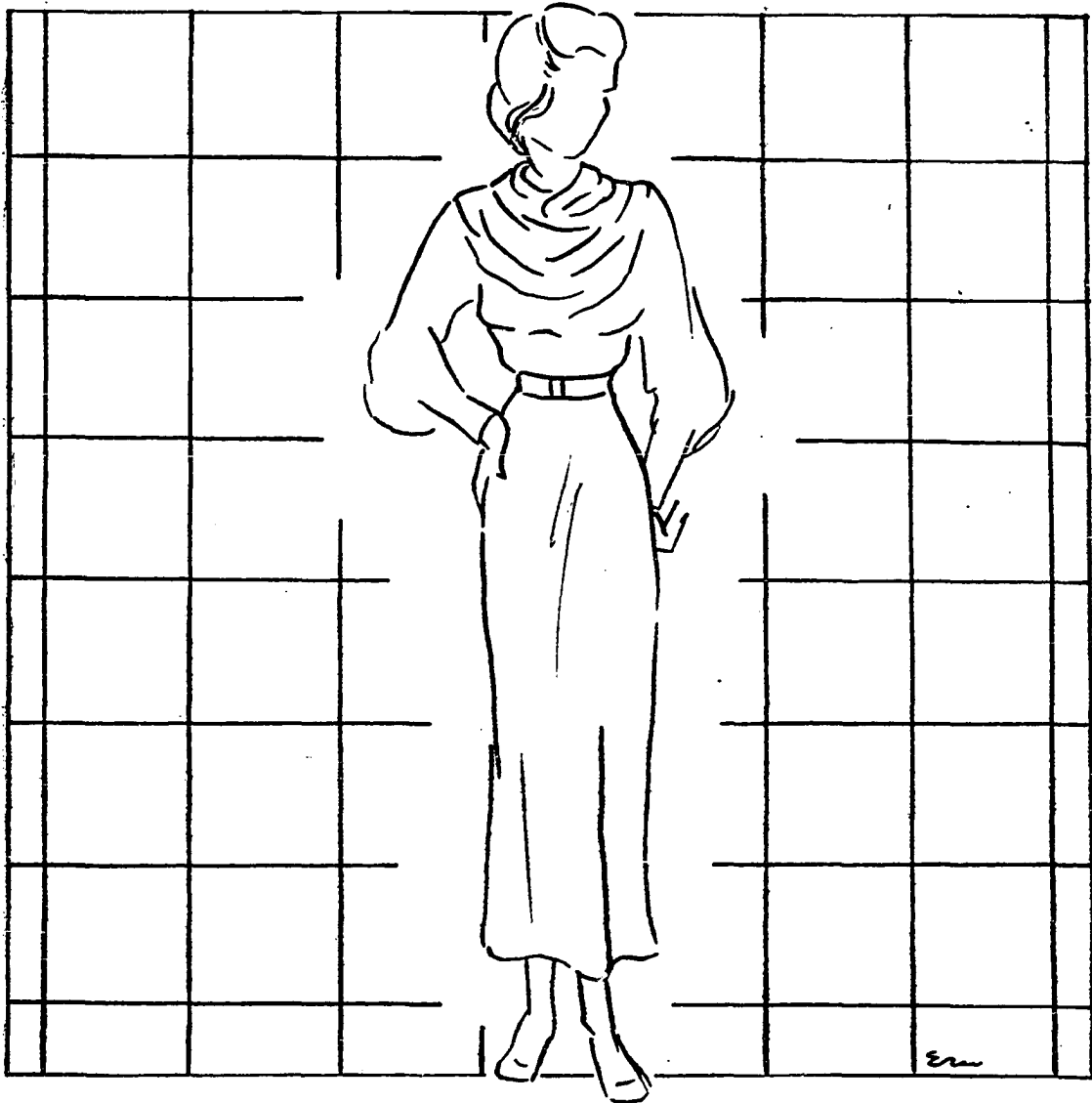


FIGURE 16

THE DRESS OF 1933

Softness had been introduced into fashionable dress at this time by details such as the draped cowl neckline and fullness in the sleeve at the elbow.

The dress of 1933 represented the typical characteristics of the fashions of the thirties. The trend toward lengthening the skirt was reversed after 1933. The skirt was gradually made shorter and fuller. It hung in a soft flare about the knees. The shoulder line was increasingly extended after 1933. These trends continued on until the end of the decade with only subtle changes.

The dress of 1940. A trim, short skirt and extended broad shoulders characterized the dress of the early forties. Figure 17 shows the typical dress of 1940 which had reached a point of extreme narrowness and shortness of skirt. Shoulders had also been made extremely wide by padding and an extension of the sleeve at the shoulder. The width of the shoulders and the trimness of the skirt created almost masculine proportions in this dress. There was little decoration or softness. Simplicity and an emphasis upon well-cut and fitted garments seemed to dominate fashionable dress at this time.

Dress of the 1940's was directly influenced by the Second World War.<sup>3</sup> The War Production Board limited the use of fabric and dressmaking materials through the emergency L-85 restrictions. These restrictions, put into effect in 1942, were designed to save materials. They also froze the styles, and no major changes in fashion were possible during the war.

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<sup>3</sup>Kerr, op. cit., p. 62.

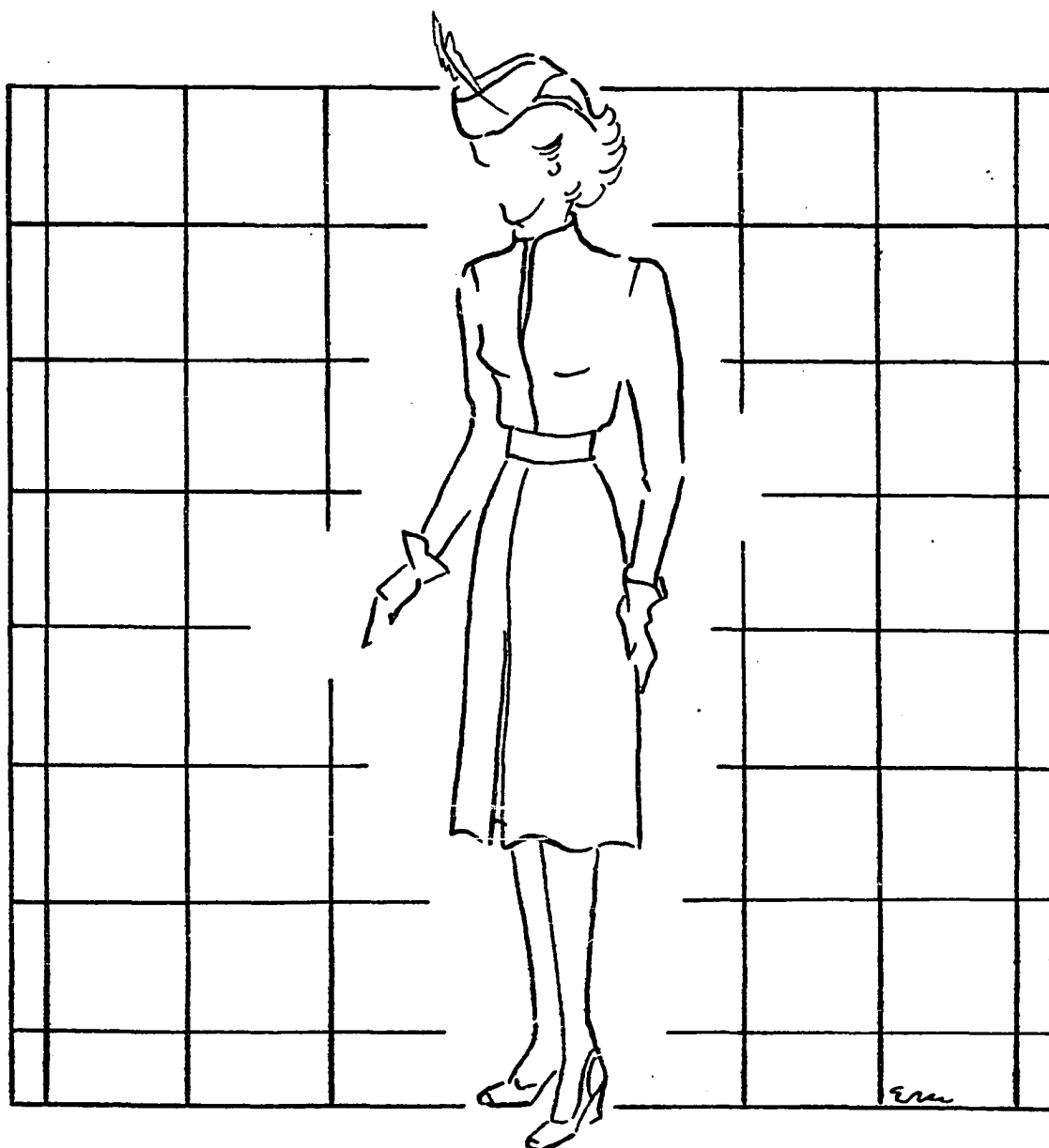


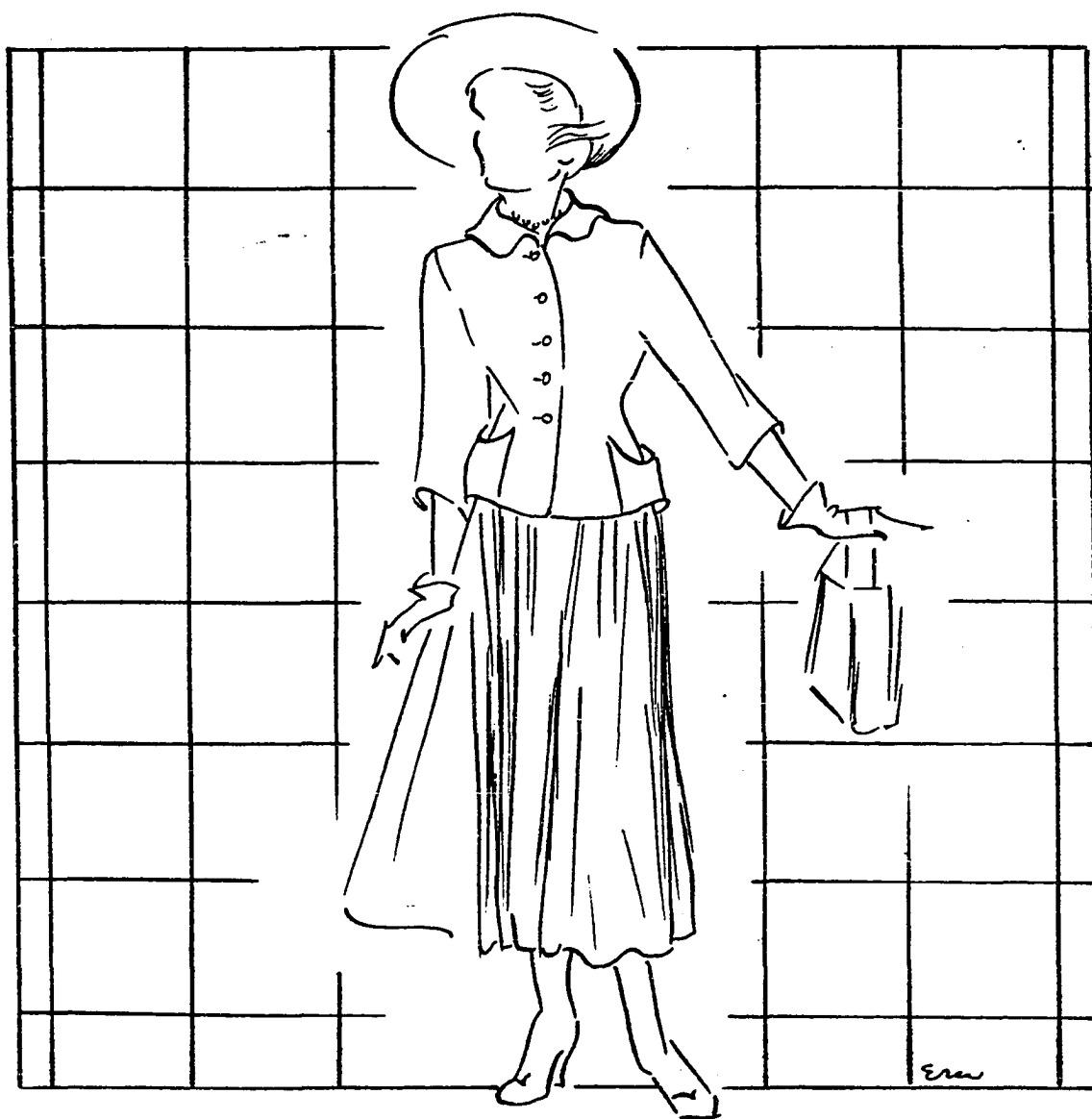
FIGURE 17  
THE DRESS OF 1940

There were some new clothes, but they were more practical in design than fashionable. Special designs were created for industrial and war work. Uniforms were designed for women in the military services. These uniforms were quite masculine in appearance with collars, lapels, and padded shoulders quite similar to men's wear. Even civilian clothes reflected the military trimness of service uniforms. Women dressed more like men during this war-time interval than at perhaps any other period in history.

The dress of 1947. Changes in dress design were so radical after the restrictions of the war were removed that the fashions which appeared in 1947 were called the "New Look."<sup>4</sup> Skirts were made long and full. They flared wide just above the ankle. Shoulders were given a softer, more rounded contour. The waistline was cinched-in with the aid of lacings and slightly restrictive undergarments. The curves of the bust and hipline were accentuated. Figure 18 illustrates the more feminine interpretation of the third tubular silhouette which was introduced in 1947.

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<sup>4</sup>Laurena Pringle, "For 10 Years the Last Word in Style," The Detroit Free Press, October 25, 1957, p. 27.



**FIGURE 18**  
**THE DRESS OF 1947**



The dress of 1950. The costume of 1950, illustrated in Figure 19, shows a trimmer interpretation of the feminine "New Look." The skirt was made slightly shorter and narrower. The shoulders, while retaining some padding, were softened by curved lines and decorative detail. The torso was smoothly fitted through the bust, waist and hips. The figure was smoothly molded and outlined. There was an emphasis upon curved lines and the feminine contours of the figure.

The fashions of 1950 were considered a means for complementing a pleasing figure and expressing the personality of the individual wearing the costumes of the day. Clothing had become functional and suited to the activities of the wearer.<sup>5</sup> The third tubular silhouette was the basis for fashions which were in relative harmony with the feminine figure and the activities of the women of the middle of the twentieth century.

The Relationship of Change in Selected Objective  
Aspects of the Social Situation  
to Fashionable Dress

The objective aspects of the social situation which were considered significant in this consideration of change in fashion and social change were selected for examination. The technological developments, economic developments, social stratification, and the family and status of women for the interval from 1930 to 1950 have

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<sup>5</sup>Dero A. Saunders and Sanford S. Parker, "The Sunny Outlook For Clothes," Fortune, XLIX (April, 1954), p. 136.

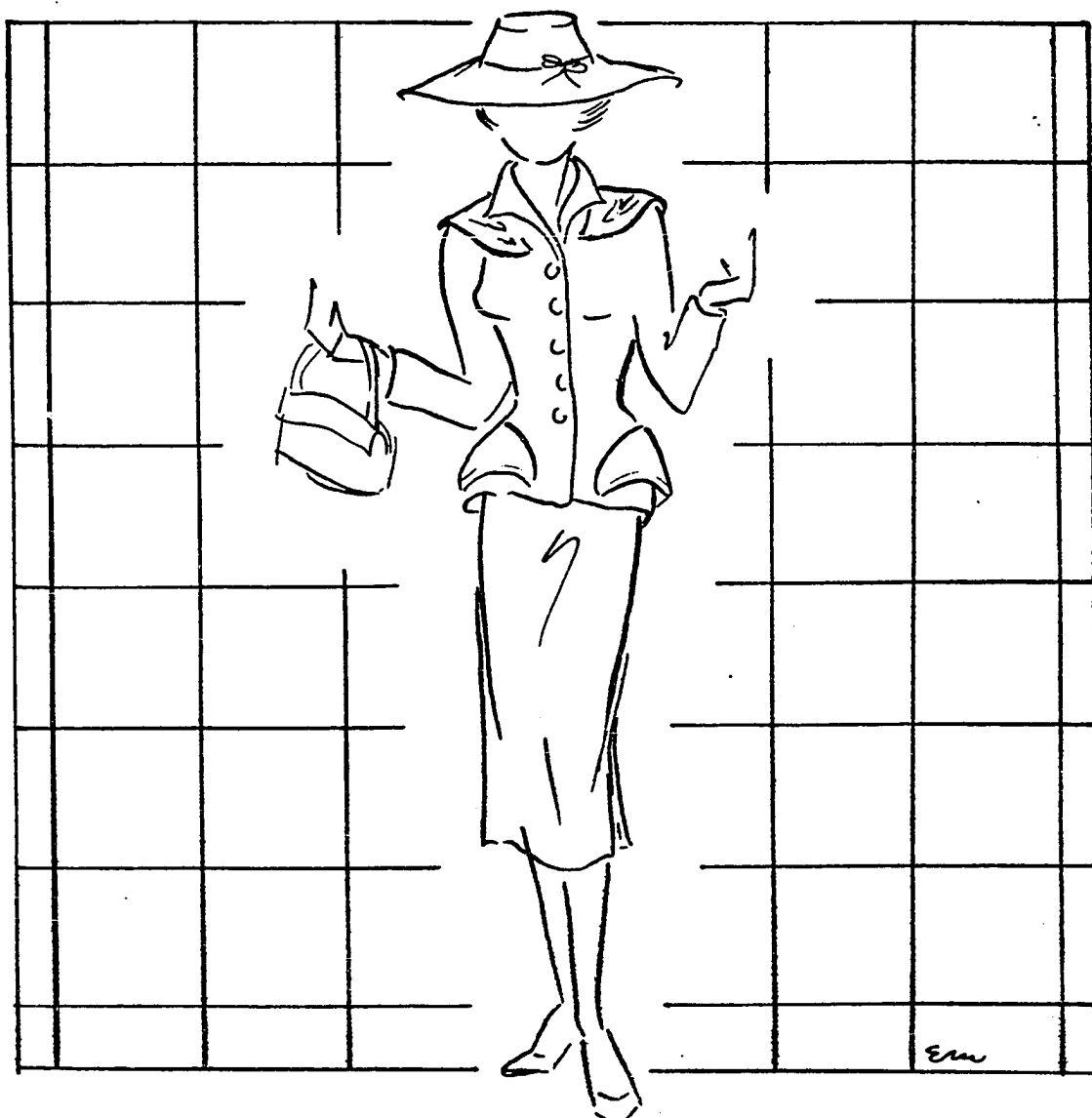


FIGURE 19  
THE DRESS OF 1950

been compared with the fashionable dress worn by women during the same time span.

Technological developments. Technological developments during this period were a continuation of those which had their beginning in the previous periods. New developments in the thirties and the forties were chiefly a perfection and practical application of many of the products of earlier invention. There were also new discoveries to add to a growing list of technological achievements. Mass production methods were improved to make items cost less and to facilitate a wider distribution.

The textile industry turned its attention to the development and production of the new synthetic fibers and fabrics during this period. The production of rayon was greatly increased to coincide with demands for a cheaper material which could approximate the qualities of silk.<sup>6</sup> The new synthetic, nylon, was discovered in 1939. Nylon was introduced to the public just before the war, but its use was restricted until war-time demands ceased. Nylon was the first of a group of synthetic fibers which were made available during the late forties.<sup>7</sup> They made fabrics of greater durability and easier maintenance than the natural fibers used for the traditional materials for dress.

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<sup>6</sup>Merle Curti, Richard H. Shryock, Thomas C. Cochran, and Fred Harvey Harrington, An American History (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), p. 392.

<sup>7</sup>Arthur S. Link, American Epoch (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), p. 592.

The third tubular silhouette in fashionable dress, which followed the natural contours of the figure, coincided with the greater availability of the synthetic fibers and new treatment of the natural fibers. Soft clinging fabrics were used in bias cuts during the thirties to emphasize a trim figure. Rayon was used for the knitted hose which short skirts had made a necessity for fashionable women. Nylon proved to be even better than rayon or silk for sheer form-fitting hose and reinforced an emphasis upon the legs. New developments in textiles brought a greater variety and suitability for use to clothing. Women's wardrobes became larger and more varied with the increased developments in textiles.

One of the fastest developing industries during this period was the automobile industry.<sup>8</sup> It also had a major role in many changes in the social situation. The increase in the use of the automobile and the dependence of most Americans upon it was demonstrated by the progress made in automobile improvements even during the stress periods of the depression and the war. The accompanying increase in highways and facilities for the use of the automobile greatly stimulated the mobility of the populace during the thirties and forties.

Another industry which fostered mobility at this time was the aviation industry.<sup>9</sup> The use of the airplane for transportation was firmly established by 1930. The war stimulated technological developments which led to an increase in speed and confidence in air travel.

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<sup>8</sup>Thomas R. Carskadon and George Soule, U S A in New Dimensions (New York: The Macmillan Company, The Twentieth Century Fund, Inc., 1957), p. 60.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

The increased mobility and greater amounts of travel by automobile and airplane corresponded with a greater use of versatile and casual clothing. The rapidity of change of locale with different weather and climatic conditions in air travel necessitated clothing which was adaptable. The informality of travel in automobiles added greater casualness to the dress fashions of the latter part of the period.<sup>10</sup> Both modes of travel made fabric stability, ease of maintenance, and a minimum of care desirable features in fashionable dress.

Increasing developments during this interval brought many technological improvements in appliances and products for the home.<sup>11</sup> Every area of the home was made more comfortable and convenient through the use of new and efficient devices. The tasks of the homemaker were made more pleasant and less time consuming. There was an increased interest in the home and in the acquisition of major appliances.

The invasion of technology into the home on an even greater scale than formerly tended to make women regard homemaking more casually. Housekeeping became more enjoyable. The necessity for doing their own work, which many women faced during the depression and war years, prompted the use of clothing more suited to the duties of the household. Fashions in dress provided more practical and usable

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<sup>10</sup>Saunders and Parker, loc. cit.

<sup>11</sup>Link, loc. cit.

clothing for wearing in the home.<sup>12</sup> The casualness of the dress of the homemaker was transmitted into other areas of fashionable dress.

This period was marked by changes in fuels and methods of heating homes and places of business. Better and more even heat made the environment more comfortable.<sup>13</sup> It also made heavy clothing unnecessary. Lighter weight materials and dress designs which did not cover the body so completely were more suited to comfortably heated homes. A shortage in the new fuels during the war had a temporary effect upon dress. Warm woolens, sweaters, and wraps were worn during the early forties. However, after supplies of fuel became more plentiful, the use of light weight fabrics and cottons for winter became fashionable.

The technological developments of this period increased many of the comforts and conveniences in the environment of women.<sup>14</sup> They made living more enjoyable. They permitted greater amounts of time to be spent at activities other than those involved in keeping house. The fashions of this period were correspondingly more comfortable, casual, and suited to use. The costumes of this era were adaptable to the host of interests which the technology of the period made available to women.

Economic developments. The economic situation from 1930 to 1950 progressed from one of the most severe economic crises the Western world had ever experienced to its highest pinnacle of prosperity.

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<sup>12</sup>"The American Look," Time Magazine, LXV (May 2, 1955), p. 90.

<sup>13</sup>Link, op. cit., p. 593.

<sup>14</sup>Fessenden S. Blanchard, "Revolution in Clothes," Harper's Magazine, CCVI (March, 1953), 59.

The despair of the Great Depression of the thirties gave way to the hope of recovery. The forties, marred by the tragedy of another world war, were years of financial upswing. The war-stimulated economy brought even greater prosperity which was shared by more people than in previous eras. The American people were in the midst of a financially favorable period by the middle of the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup>

Economic developments of the early 1930's were triggered by the New York stock market crash of 1929. The resulting depression dominated the economy of not only the United States, but also the nations of Europe. The financial collapse of the United States brought down with it the international structure which had never been completely rebuilt after World War I. A progressive slowing down of all the important parts of the economic machinery brought the nations of the world to the lowest point of economic effectiveness in 1933. Governmental intervention in the United States acted to improve the situation. The success of such intervention brought about a recovery in the late thirties.

The impact of the depression was apparent in many aspects of the social situation for women. The trend toward unemployment sent many women back to their homes. Almost all women had to sacrifice the household help and luxuries of dress which the prosperous twenties had brought. They refused to give up silk and rayon hose, but they did without many other things.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Link, op. cit., pp. 586-588.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 361.

More clothing was made at home, since women had more time and less money for dress. Fashionable dress designs and sewing techniques were simplified during this period. More or less standardized designs, such as the shirtwaist, could be made into a variety of dresses by using different materials. Fitting problems were minimized by the use of easily fitted and casual garments. Slide fasteners replaced hooks and eyes and snaps, the traditional fasteners. Such aids combined with less complicated designs permitted the home seamstress to wear fashionable clothing of her own creation.

The decade following the depression was characterized by a different economic situation. The huge federal outlays for defense and militaristic expansion during the war years greatly stimulated the economy. The conversion from war to peace time production brought additional economic expansion. Conditions were extremely favorable for the maintenance of a high general level of prosperity. The economic situation at the mid-point of the twentieth century was better for a greater proportion of the population than ever before.

The economic development of the early 1940's was paralleled by such restrictions upon dress design and the use of materials that fashionable dress did not reflect the increasing prosperity of the times. The high level of economic achievement for some people, who had had very little money to spend previous to the war-stimulated good times, resulted in some extravagances in dress which demonstrated poor taste and a lack of discrimination.



The release of available materials for dress during the prosperous economic period of post-war adjustment brought a radical change in fashionable dress.<sup>17</sup> Almost too-long and excessively full skirts for modern convenience replaced the skimpy war-time models. The women of the late forties could afford to abandon the restricted fashions of the war years. They eagerly used their improved economic resources to acquire the "New Look."

The improved economic condition at the end of the forties permitted the use of quality materials and workmanship in clothing. There were many more different types of clothes and accessories. Women's wardrobes were more extensive at a time of economic prosperity.

Social stratification. The trend characterizing social stratification after 1930 was toward a blurring of class lines and distinctions. Economic and industrial development created forces which tended toward equality and the erasure of class differences.<sup>18</sup> The most distinctive class achievement in America was the emergence of a strong, broadly inclusive middle class.<sup>19</sup>

The new middle class was partially the result of the disappearance of the old leisure classes and so-called "high society." The depression of the thirties tended to act as an economic leveler. The

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<sup>17</sup>Saunders and Parker, op. cit., p. 236.

<sup>18</sup>Joseph A. Kahl, The American Class Structure (New York: Rinehart & Co., Inc., 1957), p. 175.

<sup>19</sup>Max Lerner, America As A Civilization (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), p. 488.

differences in wealth were not so apparent at a time when incomes were decreasing.<sup>20</sup>

The effect of the prosperity of the forties was much the same: toward an enlargement of the middle class. The high taxes upon larger incomes reduced their relative benefits. Higher wages and increased salaries bought to workers many of the conveniences and comforts previously enjoyed only the the upper classes. Prosperity created a mass of industrial workers who thought and acted as members of the middle class.<sup>21</sup>

The white collar classes emerged as a result of new modes of mass production and distribution and changes in the occupational system. The number of professional persons increased. The unskilled group, which occupied the lowest social and prestige position, had decreased. The largest gains were made in the business office workers and service groups. These occupations played a greater role in the expanded commercial activity of the nation.<sup>22</sup>

The expansion of the middle class was marked by an increase in middle class sentiment. The attitudes which made up this middle class emphasis were not associated with any one group in America. They were principally a denial of the existence of any recognizable social stratification in the country.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Link, op. cit., pp. 603-604.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Robert M. MacIver and Charles H. Page, Society (New York: Rinehart and Co., Inc., 1949), pp. 368-370.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

Lines of distinction between the classes through dress had almost been eliminated by this time. Differences in quality of material and workmanship were detectable, but not obvious. A degree of taste could be achieved with inexpensive fabrics and factory-made designs.<sup>24</sup>

The lack of other distinctions in dress speeded up fashion changes during this period. Fashionable dress became more and more a matter of timing. The upper classes got the new fashions first, and then they trickled down the class structure. The adoption of a new fashion before it could reach the other groups became a mark of distinction and an indication of a superior position.<sup>25</sup>

Members of the larger middle class manifested the greatest interest in fashion and fashion changes at the mid-point of the twentieth century. College girls and young matrons of the business and professional groups were the fashion carriers. They dressed more to show their own individuality than to imitate or to impress other groups. They selected clothes to express their own creativeness and the taste of their own class level.<sup>26</sup> Fashionable dress in America had become largely an expression of the dominant middle class.

The family and status of women. Changes in the family and status of women presented a situation of increasing complexity during

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<sup>24</sup>Lerner, op. cit., p. 646.

<sup>25</sup>Bernard Barber, Social Stratification (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1957), pp. 149-150.

<sup>26</sup>Lerner, op. cit., p. 647.

this period from 1930 to 1950. Some trends which had been initiated during the previous decade were continued, but many were reversed. There seemed to be no well-defined direction to the sequence of change in this respect of the social situation.

The number of marriages declined in the first years of the depression of the thirties. Women married later, had fewer children, and were more willing to dissolve an unhappy marriage. There were slight reversals in these trends after the depths of the depression had been reached.<sup>27</sup>

The movement to the cities was still strong in the thirties. More families were being brought into an urban environment. The trend toward the larger cities was broken after 1933 when smaller cities and suburban areas became more popular for family living.<sup>28</sup>

There were increasing fluctuations in marriage and family statistics during the forties. The number of marriages and the birth rate increased during the war years. The high point in the number of marriages, and in the number of divorces, was reached just after the war in 1946. The birth rate also showed significant increase after the termination of the war. There was a greater emphasis upon marriage, and the size of families showed an increase with the approach of 1950.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Ray E. Baber, Marriage and the Family (2nd ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill Company, Inc., 1953), p. 446.

<sup>28</sup>Link, op. cit., p. 603.

<sup>29</sup>Baber, loc. cit.

The increased number of families and the larger sized families were indicative of a greater interest in the home. More families began to move out of the central city areas into the outlying and suburban areas. There was an increase in home ownership. Families became more interested in participating in home and community centered activities.<sup>30</sup>

The number of women working outside the home during this period continued to increase. The proportion of all workers which were women increased during the thirties in spite of the depression. The demands of defense and war-time production coupled with the departure of men to do the fighting brought an even greater proportion of women into the working world. Over one-third, or 36.1 per cent, of all workers employed at the peak of war-time production in 1945 were women. This figure dropped to 33.1 per cent by 1950, since many women relinquished their jobs to men returning from the armed services. The married women slightly exceeded the number of single women in the work group at the end of the forties.<sup>31</sup>

The increase in the number of married women working during the latter part of this period brought a variety of changes into the home. The increased income tended to raise the level of living of many families with two jobs. Women did not, however, have sufficient time to care for their families. More nursery schools and organized

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<sup>30</sup>Link, loc. cit.

<sup>31</sup>Baber, op. cit., pp. 342-343.

play groups assisted the working mother during the forties, but they could not provide adequate substitutes. Husbands were frequently brought into sharing the duties of making and running a home. The participation of both husband and wife in running the home brought about an equality which was cooperative rather than competitive. The specialization of roles of wage earner and housekeeper was minimized at this time.<sup>32</sup>

The acquisition of freedom and equality for which women had worked so hard to gain still left women of the mid-twentieth century at a loss. They just did not know what to do with it. In theory, women had attained freedom to compete with men. The law granted them equality with men. But women realized they lived in a society dominated by masculine standards. They were faced with a disturbing dilemma at the close of the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>33</sup>

Fashionable dress of this period reflected the needs of women working at their homemaking duties, women working outside the home, and those who did both. The combination of increased emphasis upon the family and women working influenced the development of clothing suited to the variety of activities in which women were engaged. Many dress designs were adaptable and could be worn for working either within or outside the home. There were more designs for specific purposes. In addition to increased variation in dress, clothing became more casual, comfortable, and easier to maintain.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 364.

<sup>33</sup>Lerner, op. cit., pp. 604-605.

<sup>34</sup>Saunders and Parker, op. cit., p. 234.

The increase in the birthrate and larger families coincided with the inclusion of maternity dress as part of fashionable dress. Women no longer remained out of sight while waiting for their children. Provided with attractive costumes designed for the purpose, women could continue their jobs and social activities during pregnancy.

The equal status of women, which had become accepted at this time, corresponded with a tendency for women to use masculine details in fashionable dress. Especially during the war years, women wore collars, lapels, and buttoned front closings on suits and coats. Shoulders were padded to give a broad shouldered look. Skirts were cut very straight and slender. The result was an almost masculine silhouette.

The willingness of women to assume the responsibilities of their achieved status was shown in the wearing of practical and serviceable dresses. Women also wore service and work uniforms which were only slight adaptations of masculine uniforms. Pants and slacks were accepted and worn as suited to working in jobs customarily held by men.

A lack of assurance in their new status prompted an ambivalence between masculine and feminine details of dress in the fashions of this period. The straight hanging garments of the twenties had been replaced by more figure revealing designs in the early thirties. The use of curved lines and the soft fabrics of the thirties were then gradually replaced by straight lines and firm materials. Women's dress

closely imitated men's wear during the war period. This masculine effect in dress was quickly discarded for a more feminine interpretation after the war. Women seemed eager to return to designs which once more enhanced their femininity without increasing their dependency. These fluctuations in dress coincided with the uncertainty of women in their achieved status.

The Relationship of Change in Selected Subjective  
Aspects of the Social Situation  
to Fashionable Dress

The interval between 1930 and 1950 was one of significant change in the subjective definitions of the social situation of the period. There were changes in many of the attitudes and values which guided the behavior of women at this time. The major changes in the subjective aspects of the social situation which were selected for examination from the standpoint of determining a relationship to fashionable dress are: the equalization of the sexes, increased practicality and adaptability, greater informality, and the development of a middle class orientation. Changes in fashionable dress, involving variations in design lines and the use of new fibers and textures, corresponded with these changes in the definition of the situation for women.

Equalization of the sexes. The freedom and equality which women had achieved during the preceding period led to an equalization of the sexes after 1930. More women were accepted and kept in jobs and positions during the depression. Women substituted for men in



many capacities during the war. They were employed not only as clerical workers, but also as riveters and factory workers. Many important war-time responsibilities were shared by women.

Married women who worked outside the home shared in the maintenance and support of their households. They supplemented their husband's income, so that their family's level of living could be higher. Men in such homes frequently assisted in the tasks and duties of the homemaker. There was greater cooperation between husbands and wives of such households than had been the case with a specialization of wage earner and housekeeping positions.<sup>35</sup>

The equalization of the sexes coincided with a greater use of masculine contours and tailored details in women's dress. The trim, broad-shouldered silhouette of women's suits of the early forties was quite mannish in appearance.<sup>36</sup> The wearing of only slight adaptations of men's uniforms and the wearing of work uniforms and pants signified women's acceptance of a position equal in many respects to that of men.

A lack of satisfaction with a role of equality with men was conveyed by the use of feminine details in dress during the early thirties and just after the war. The first hesitancy in the new equality appeared at the beginning of the depression. Women were not

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<sup>35</sup>Jessie Bernard, "The United States," The Institutions of Advanced Societies, ed. Arnold M. Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), pp. 624-625.

<sup>36</sup>Kerr, op. cit., pp. 62-63.

confident of their status at that time. They went back to an expression of femininity by using curved lines and softer details in fashionable dress. After the war women were not so sure they wanted the responsibilities of men. They had been willing to share the burdens of a war emergency, but they were not certain of being willing to continue. Their eagerness to return to femininity, at least in dress, was shown by the adoption of the "New Look." Women gave up the trim tailored lines of men's wear very quickly for the lines and fabrics which would flatter feminine figures.

Practicality and adaptability. The social situation of this period required greater practicality and adaptability of women. During the depression the work and management of women helped many families to weather economic difficulties. Many women worked both inside and outside the home. Decreased incomes necessitated the acceptance of more homemaking duties. Home baking, canning, and sewing replaced the commercial services of the previous decade.<sup>37</sup> The war years demanded even more of women. They substituted for men in many jobs while their own housekeeping tasks increased. Shortages of services and household help forced more women to find efficient ways of caring for their own and their families' needs.

Changes in the homemaking activities of women led to increased practicality and adaptability in fashionable dress. The increased responsibilities of women prompted the selection of dress designs which would permit more practical use. Dresses were cut and shaped

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<sup>37</sup>Link, op. cit., p. 361.

more in harmony with the natural figure for ease and activity. More durable materials were used for dress wear. Costumes which would permit adaptability in use were developed for the varied demands upon women during the depression and during the war years. Many dresses of the thirties had jackets for adjustment to various temperature changes and different occasions. American designer Claire McCardell provided a war-time version of a dinner dress with apron to match. This was, "for women who were forced to be their own maids."<sup>38</sup> Suits and jacket dresses became very popular with a greater emphasis upon costumes which would serve several purposes. Women wanted their dress to be versatile enough to suit the succession of activities which filled each day in their busy lives.

Informality. There was an increase in informality during this interval which had its beginning in the depression and its culmination in the post-war years. The increase in household duties performed by American homemakers, the increase in the number of women who worked, the upsetting of traditional standards by war-time emergencies, larger families, more homes in the suburbs, and more home-centered activities all contributed to the development of greater informality in American living. The pressures of increased demands of a job, children, and a house forced many women to relax the more exacting standards of previous eras.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>"The American Look," loc. cit.

<sup>39</sup>Saunders and Parker, op. cit., p. 136.

Informality and casualness, which had been characteristic of sports wear, became typical of most fashionable dress after 1930. The diversity of activities which faced American women during this interval prompted the selection of relatively simple and comfortable garments. Dress designs followed the natural shape and contour of the figure. Skirts were either short or wide enough to permit freedom of movement. The attractiveness of garments designed for wear at home tempted women to wear their casual costumes elsewhere. Informality had become the keynote of fashionable dress at the midpoint of the twentieth century.

Middle class orientation. One of the important aspects of this period was the development of a middle class orientation. The proportion of the population achieving middle class status in the United States was greatly increased during this period from 1930 to 1950. This trend was greatly assisted by the predominant sentiment in America.<sup>40</sup> Most people had begun to think of themselves as middle class. The trend toward equalization in income and increased education coupled with a rise in consumption standards had the "effect of increasing middle class patterns of thinking."<sup>41</sup>

The dominance of numbers in the middle class and the wide acceptance of similar patterns of thinking coincided with a growing similarity in dress. It also resulted in a greater consciousness of fashion on the part of the masses. The fashions of the period

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<sup>40</sup>MacIver and Page, op. cit., p. 368.

<sup>41</sup>Bernard, op. cit., p. 669.

following 1930 were more representative of the definition of the situation of middle class women than of the small elite group. Women of the middle class became the carriers of fashion change. More women became interested in fashion change after it had become a part of the middle class pattern.<sup>42</sup>

Changes in fashionable dress during this period became more subtle variations of structural areas and design lines than major alterations of contour. Fluctuations in the skirt length and alterations in width at the shoulder line were the principal changes in fashion at this time. There were also variations in the use of lines to enhance different parts of the feminine figure. There was a greater acceptance of standardized dress designs in spite of an acceleration of change in fashionable dress.

The Relationship of Crises in the Social Situation  
to Fashionable Dress

This interval between 1930 and 1950 was dominated by two major crises and accompanying disturbances of lesser import. One major crisis was the Great Depression of the 1930's. The other was the Second World War. Both had significant impact upon the social situation and upon fashionable dress.

The depression followed the stock market crash in New York in 1929. The collapse of the economy extended to Europe in 1931, and

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<sup>42</sup>Lerner, op. cit., p. 646.

the United States reached the depths of financial stagnation in 1933. Relief measures in that year brought a gradual reversal in the economy, and the worst of the depression seemed to be over in 1934. There were economic fluctuations in the latter thirties, but actual recovery was not accomplished until the end of the decade.

The major change in the dress silhouette corresponded with the changed financial situation. The extremely short skirt of the late twenties was lengthened in 1930. The waistline was replaced at a point closer to the normal position on the figure. These changes distinguished the third tubular silhouette from the version of the earlier period.

The alterations of dress design within the third tubular silhouette varied somewhat with the financial fluctuations. The skirt reached its longest point, just above the ankles, in 1933. The waistline was at the normal waistline position in that year. The improving financial conditions of the country coincided with the use of shorter skirts in dress. Increased width at the shoulder line through the use of pads and larger sleeves accompanied this fluctuating economic situation.<sup>43</sup>

More important than changes in line designs were the changes in types of clothing. Dresses were simpler in cut and more adaptable to a variety of uses. Decreased incomes and greater responsibility of women for the management of money during a time of financial stress prompted more practical and wearable fashions in dress.

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<sup>43</sup>Kerr, op. cit., pp. 58-59.

The conflict which was to be labeled World War II started with disturbances in Europe in 1938. Most of the European nations were soon involved, and the United States entered the war in 1941.

Fashions of the early forties were dominated by the war. Regulations were imposed upon dress and prevented any major change in dress. Fashions were stabilized for the duration of the war. New clothes were more practical than fashionable. Most new garments were skimpy and short in compliance with the war regulations to conserve materials. The influence of men's uniforms was strongly reflected in details of dresses and suits for women.

There were many subtle changes due to the restrictions of a nation at war. Heavier materials were used for warmth in areas where fuel oil was rationed or unobtainable. Woolens, jerseys, and sweaters were used in chilly homes and offices. Gasoline rationing limited the use of automobiles and necessitated more walking. This plus shoe rationing made practical and conservative shoes a necessity. Clothes which permitted more freedom of movement were necessary for more active women. Dresses were fitted less tightly, since foundation garments were almost impossible to obtain. Silk and nylon hose were practically unobtainable. Hose were made of rayon or cotton, but more often leg make-up took the place of actual stockings. Women made many adjustments and used substitutions in their wearing apparel at this time.

The termination of the war in 1945 ended the imposed restrictions and released many new and old products to a waiting population. The post war period was one of rapid readjustment and recovery.

Fashionable dress of the post-war years were indicative of-- the release of dress materials. Fabrics were used extravagantly to launch the first changes in fashion after the war. The "New Look" was based upon a long wide skirt and figure-emphasizing lines. Its initial exuberance was modified after its first appearance in 1947. Fashionable dress became trimmer and more individualistic with the approach of the mid-point of the twentieth century.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 71.



## CHAPTER VIII

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The preceding chapters have presented the sequence of changes in the basic contours of women's dress and the corresponding changes in selected aspects of the social situation during the century from 1850 to 1950. In the case of both social change and fashion, only major changes were considered for purposes of comparison. Since one of the difficulties in dealing with fashion is the fact that fashion by definition implies change, it is necessary to differentiate between yearly fluctuations in the minor aspects of fashion and changes in the basic form of dress. While it is difficult to associate a minor fashion change with a specific social change, major fashion changes seem to accompany changes in the social situation.

It was hypothesized in the beginning of this study that a relationship existed between changes in fashion and changes in the social situation. It was also hypothesized that style and fashion were manifestations of attitudes and values which are part of the social processes of Western civilization, and that dress fashions may provide a means whereby social change may be detected.

This study, through a consideration of a few selected aspects of the total socio-cultural environment, is an attempt

to evaluate the plausibility of hypotheses concerning the relationship between major changes in dress fashions and changes of a social nature. It is also an endeavor to examine women's dress as a visual expression of the attitudes and values characteristic of people in designated social situations. While causal relationships are implied in certain circumstances, no attempt was made to attribute specific fashion changes to specific social changes.

The situational approach of W. I. Thomas was used as an analytical device for the development of this problem. The hypotheses were examined through an application of Thomas' concepts of the "situation," the "definition of the situation," and the "crisis."<sup>1</sup> This comparison of changes in technological and economic developments, changes in social stratification, and changes in the family and status of women reveals a correspondence of points of change in fashion with significant changes in the objective aspects of the social situation. Fashions in dress also seem, by inference, to be expressive of changes in subjective aspects of the social situation. Dress designs throughout the interval under consideration altered as changes in values and attitudes occurred in Western society.

However, a broader and more intensive treatment of the problem might yield more conclusive results than have been possible within the limitations of this study. There has been no discovery of a means for using dress fashions to detect social change. It is hoped that

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<sup>1</sup>Edmund H. Volkart, ed., Social Behavior and Personality: Contributions of W. I. Thomas to Theory and Social Research. (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1951), pp. 6-13.

further study may lead to the development of such a device.

An interpretation of the findings of this study is given in the summary which follows.

### Summary

This attempt to establish a relationship between change in fashion and change in the social structure is centered around the sequence of alterations in both women's dress and the social situation. For observation the century from 1850 to 1950 was divided into five intervals. Each of these intervals presented to the women a distinctive socio-cultural situation. The reactions to the situation of each era were embodied in a characteristic form of dress. Changes and alterations of the social situation were accompanied by changes in women's dress. These changes in fashion have been found to correspond to changes in the objective aspects of the situation, to changes in the definition of the situation, and to the crises of the times.

The first period for study, the interval between 1850 and 1869, presented a situation largely influenced by increasing technological developments. The resulting mechanization and industrialization created greater economic prosperity for the dominant upper classes. Women were devoted to their families and assigned to a place in the home.

The dress of women at this time was based upon the bell silhouette. Its wide contours were created by long gathered skirts which

became wider and more elaborately decorated. The technological developments of the era provided more and more material from the mechanized looms, and the sewing machine turned out intricate trimmings. The prosperity of the upper classes permitted the use of beautiful and fragile fabrics and costly decorations. The upper classes displayed their wealth and distinctive status by wearing not only expensive costumes, but dresses which also prevented any useful activity on the part of the wearer. Women were as confined to leisure and inactivity by their wide bell-shaped skirts as by the masculine dictum that "woman's place is in the home."

The style of dress based upon the bell silhouette developed within the possibilities presented by the objective aspects of the situation in a manner also expressive of the "definition of the situation" of the majority of women. The bell-shaped costume with its wide skirt and tight bodice was beautiful, feminine, and modest. It incorporated an expression of the romanticism, prudery, femininity, and dependency of the women of the era. The crinoline could even convey through its extent and lavish decoration the growing importance of wealth and the distinctiveness of social classification. The underlying attitudes of the times were apparent in fashionable dress.

Crisis events of a disturbing nature corresponded with change in dress. The maximum exaggeration in skirt fullness and encumbrance of movement was reached in 1863, the mid-point of the Civil War in the United States. A decrease in the width of the skirt was initiated

at that time. The demise of the bell silhouette coincided with the end of the Second Empire in France. The political unrest in Paris stimulated a change of situation which was reflected in the fashionable dress of the latter portion of the nineteenth century.

The situation of the interval from 1870 to 1889 was characterized by an acceleration of technological developments which created new mechanized devices for industry and for the home. This was an era of prosperity. Extensive economic empires and fortunes were built to form the basis for a new upper class. The holders of new wealth began to encroach upon the position of the previous prestige group. Women were still devoted to the care of their homes and families.

A new silhouette replaced the bell-shaped contour as the basis for dress design after 1870. The bustle silhouette used even more of the increasingly available fabrics and trimmings produced by the machines of the period. Costly materials were used in creating fashionable dress, since this was an era of wealth. Women were indulged in great extravagances in dress. Dress proved to be useful as a mark of class identification in a situation of change in social stratification. The limited extent of activities for women permitted the use of the encumbering bustle in their dress.

The definition of the situation by women confronted with increasing technological developments, greater wealth, and a new emphasis upon social class status was incorporated in the new bustle silhouette. Fashion in dress became more important, and changes were more frequent

in accordance with new definitions and new perceptions of the situation for women. Dress was made more elaborate and costly to express the wealth and success of the builders of fortunes. Fashionable dress became over-ornamented and extremely hampering to movement and activity as a means of identification with the leisure class. Realistic rather than romantic, the women of this period used the bustle for the purpose of proclaiming their wealth and position. There was more concern with creating an impression than with creating beauty. The resignation of women to a role of dependency was signified by the wearing of a dress based upon a feature of dress design which made women practically helpless. It emphasized the femininity of women and conveyed the satisfaction of the majority of women with their role.

Crises in France seemed to coincide with the change of silhouette in dress, since Paris was still dominant in the fashion world. The adoption of the bustle as a new form in dress corresponded with the establishment of the Third Republic in France. The political upset in 1889 in Paris corresponded with the termination of the use of the bustle in fashionable dress.

The interval from 1890 to 1907 was a period of transition. Rapidly developing technological developments created a situation quite different from those of the previous periods. Women were presented with improvements in communication, transportation, and conveniences for the home. The relaxation of demands upon women for homemaking permitted some free time for outside activity. The use of the telephone and the typewriter in business created new opportunities for women to work outside the home. An increasingly improving

economic situation created a general level of prosperity and extreme wealth for a few. The upper class, which was fast disappearing, attempted to maintain a distinction from the emerging new middle class.

The reaction of women to these new aspects of the situation was expressed in the choice of a new silhouette as a basis for their dress. Fashionable costumes were based upon the long tubular shape of the natural figure after 1890. Free flowing skirts were adopted to permit more activity and freedom of movement. The situation for women was less restrictive, and women began to discard the hinderance embodied in the fashionable dress of the preceding eras.

The choice of dress by women after 1890 conveyed the new freedom and equality with men which characterized their new definition of the situation. They selected dress which did not restrict activity as much as formerly. Women emphasized their feminine contours and added to their femininity by a coquettish use of ruffled silk petticoats. Renewed concern with a creation of beauty in dress coincided with increased romanticism. There was an indication of a relaxation of prudery in lower necklines and shorter skirts for sports. The trend toward reform was reflected in efforts to change the design of confining undergarments. The effort to use dress for class distinction fostered extravagance and snobbery in fashionable dress. Costly materials and discriminating taste created a look of elegance in costume which could be achieved only by the wealthy upper class.

The absence of disturbing crises during this period permitted a gradual transition from the first tubular silhouette to a second version. Gradual changes also marked the social situation at this time.

The interval from 1908 to 1929 was marked by even greater change in the situation for women. Technological developments created many new products and machines. More appliances and conveniences made the homes of the era more comfortable and easier for women to maintain. Economic developments permitted an unequal distribution of the benefits of improved financial conditions. But there was a high level of general prosperity. The new middle class increased in numbers and importance. There was less distinction between social classes. The home and family occupied a less dominant place in the lives of women at this time. Many obtained jobs outside the home. The final achievement in obtaining equality was the granting of the vote to women in 1920.

These changes in the situation were accompanied by fashionable dress based upon a new version of the tubular silhouette. Increased freedom and less restraint in the environment prompted greater freedom in dress. Skirts were shortened, necklines lowered, and waistlines minimized. Fashionable dresses hung on the figure in a loose and comfortable manner.

The dress of this period, based upon the second tubular silhouette portrayed the new freedom and equality for women. The fashions also expressed the restlessness and disillusionment, the relaxation



of moral standards, and a negation of the femininity of the women of the era. The rapid changes in design lines and structural areas of dress design corresponded with the restlessness of the period. The exaggerated treatment of fashionable designs, the extreme shortness of the skirt, and the creation of the straight boyish figure through dress all served to convey the attitudes of the women of this period.

The major crisis of this period was the first World War. The beginning of the conflict coincided with the use of an extremely narrow skirt in dress. During the war the presence of new stimuli induced the use of shorter skirts which permitted more freedom. The end of the war and subsequent adjustment period precipitated the longer skirt and elongated chemise line. The extremely short skirt was fashionable at the height of prosperity of the twenties. The point of change in skirt length coincided with the reversal of the economic situation. Skirts were made longer just after the collapse of the economy in 1929.

The last interval under observation for study, the years from 1930 to 1950, was dominated by the economic depression of the thirties and World War II of the early forties. Technological developments created new products and new techniques for their distribution. Old products were improved and refined. The economy was hampered by the depression in the early part of this period, but it was stimulated by the war of the forties. The adjustment years after the war were extremely prosperous for an increasing proportion of the populace. The emergence of the larger middle class tended to blur class lines.

Interest in the home increased. Families became larger and centered around the home for recreational activities and greater enjoyment.

This situation was portrayed by a third version of the tubular silhouette in fashionable dress. Women utilized the new synthetic fibers and clinging textiles to develop a basic form of dress which followed the shape of the natural figure. The leveling effect of the economic depression and the blurring of class lines necessitated fewer distinctions in dress. The greater interest in the home and home activities fostered more comfortable and casual dress.

The definition of the situation presented to women after 1930 was portrayed by the third tubular silhouette. The attitude toward an equalization of the sexes was apparent from the use of dress designs which revealed feminine contours and yet retained the straight tubular effect. A willingness to accept the responsibilities of men during the war was expressed by an extension of the shoulder line to a masculine broadness. Women's suits also borrowed tailored collars and lapels from the uniforms of the men's services. A new informality and practicality in the manner of living fostered by the depression and the war prompted the selection of dress designs which were casual and adaptable to many uses. The trend toward the dominant middle class orientation was portrayed by the similarity of dress designs and the acceptance of more standardized fashions.

The crises of this period stimulated change in the situation and in dress. The stock market crash marked the point at which the extremely short skirt was lengthened and the third tubular silhouette

was established. The low point in the financial depression was reached in 1933, the same year that skirts were made a new longer length. An almost masculine silhouette achieved by means of broadened shoulders and a short trim skirt coincided with the beginning of the second World War. The termination of the war was followed by the return to a completely feminine interpretation in fashionable dress.

### Conclusions

This study was prepared as an approach to an understanding of change in women's dress and a contribution to the development of an explanation for fashion as it exists in contemporary society. It used only one method of analysis, and the study was limited for manageability to a consideration of women's daytime dress. This study was undertaken as a search for an explanation of change in fashion; but since it was a treatment of the major and basic changes in dress, it was only a beginning of the necessary investigation. There are many other aspects of change in dress and change in the social structure which may have a bearing upon fashion. It is hoped that the findings of this study may contribute to a further development of the larger problem.

The concepts of W. I. Thomas<sup>2</sup> provided a framework for the observation of change in fashion and change in the social situation. It may be observed that the situation, a configuration of factors which influence behavior, provided the conditions for the creation

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

of fashionable dress. Changes in the objective aspects of the situation were found to be accompanied by changes in the basic contours of women's dress. Costumes worn during each of the designated intervals were reflective of attitudes and values held by the majority of women of the era. Changes in the subjective aspects of the situation throughout the century observed were expressed by relevant changes in clothing design. Crisis events corresponded with change in the silhouettes of fashionable dress sufficiently to warrant a recognition of the effects of disturbing stimuli upon the social situation and upon women's dress.

From these findings, it may be concluded that the general characteristics of women's fashionable dress conform to the objective, subjective, and crisis aspects of change in the social situation. Throughout the period from 1850 to 1950 major changes in fashion were observed to correspond with changes in the social situation. Changes in the basic forms and contours were reflective and expressive of specific changes of a social nature. The correspondence of change in fashion with change in the selected aspects of the social situation seems to be indicative of a significant relationship rather than the product of chance.

The findings of this study could be expanded by a consideration of factors which were not included in this investigation. An observation of changes in masculine wearing apparel and an extension of time beyond the bounds of the century designated for this study might augment and confirm the present conclusions. A treatment of the whole range of different types of clothing, such as evening

dressess and play clothes, would perhaps illustrate more clearly the changes in the social situation for women as interpreted through fashion.

There are other approaches which might be utilized for a study of major changes in dress. An analysis of fashion in terms of change in status and role definitions of the female in American society would contribute to an understanding of more basic changes in society and fashion. Also the timing of basic changes in fashion could be approached from the standpoint of the role of crisis in stimulating change. Fashion changes at a given moment of time might be shown to reflect more specifically the effects of a disturbance or a crisis event.

Factors which influence the incessant fluctuations of fashion might also be examined. In order to account for minor fashion changes it is possible to consider how the designers of clothing operate, how clothing is advertised and sold, and how clothing is manufactured. A study of one or more of these factors would give clues for an interpretation of yearly or more frequent alterations in dress.

This study, a search for an observable relationship, is seen as essentially an initial contribution to a gathering of the material needed for the achievement of a better understanding of clothing behavior and the mechanisms of change in dress. It is hoped that this investigation may provide a basis and a stimulus to further research. Subsequent studies may yield more conclusive results toward an explanation of the role of fashion in contemporary society.

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## VITA

Elinor Roth Nugent was born in St. Louis County, Missouri, on January 5, 1916. Early education was received at Price School, and graduation from Clayton High School in June, 1933 was followed by part-time study at Washington University School of Fine Arts in St. Louis, Missouri.

In September of 1934, she enrolled at the University of Missouri and received the degree of Bachelor of Science in Home Economics in June, 1938. This was followed by graduate study at the University of Missouri combined with teaching at the University of Missouri and Stephens College at Columbia, Missouri. The degree of Master of Arts was received in June, 1943.

The author taught Home Economics and Art at Hood College in Frederick, Maryland from 1943 until 1946. In the fall of that year, she became a member of the faculty of the Department of Textiles, Clothing and Related Arts at Michigan State College in East Lansing, Michigan.

Graduate study toward the doctorate in Sociology was initiated at Michigan State College and was transferred to Louisiana State University in 1953. Full-time study while on sabbatical leave was followed by part-time study combined with teaching in the Department of Home Economics at Louisiana State University.

Study was deferred by marriage to John F. Nugent and the birth of a son, Francis Joseph, in 1956. The author returned to Michigan State University as Assistant Professor in Home Economics in 1958 and taught there for two years.

At the present time she is a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the commencement of January, 1962.

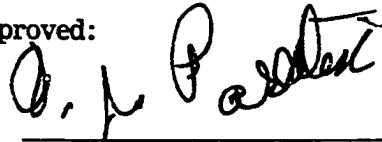
## EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Nugent, Elinor Roth

Major Field: Sociology

Title of Thesis: "The Relationship of Fashion in Women's Dress to  
Selected Aspects of Social Change from 1850 - 1950"

Approved:

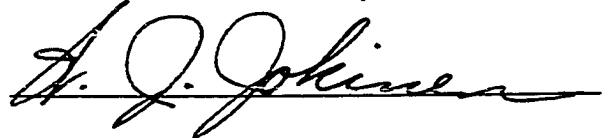
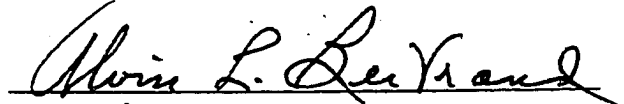
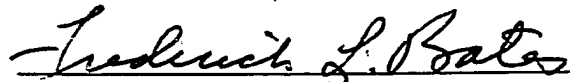


Major Professor and Chairman



Dean of the Graduate School

### EXAMINING COMMITTEE:



Date of Examination: December 18, 1961